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ZANE GREY'S WESTERN Magazine

MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT OF

THUNDER MOUNTAIN

By ZANE GREY

ALSO SHORT STORIES AND FEATURES

Sherman

"Look there woman! You'll see your lover hanged!"

Thunder Mountain, Chap. 14

ZANE GREY'S WESTERN MAGAZINE

Vol. 1, No. 6—August, 1947

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THIS MONTH'S MAGAZINE ABRIDGMENT

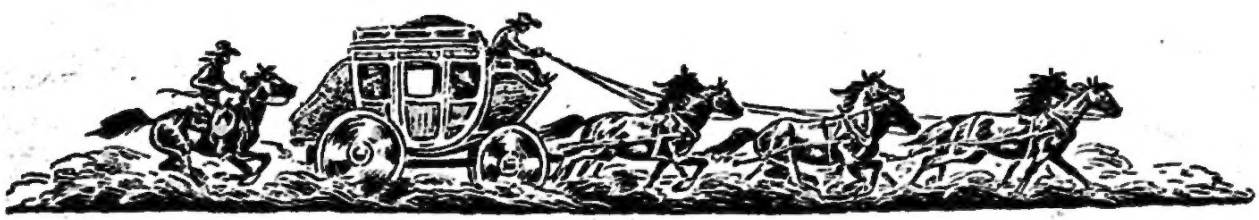
POWERFUL, *brooding, sinister, Thunder Mountain frowns down upon the puny mortals who invade its lonely slopes in their grubbing search for gold. Greedy for the precious metal, they ignore the mysterious, repeated mutterings and rumblings which roll forth from its interior, seemingly in defiant warning; unheedingly they play out their passionate, death-ridden drama.*

Against this solemn and majestic natural background, which Zane Grey could present so effectively, Lee Emerson—nicknamed "Kalispel"—plays his desperate game with Fortune. Kalispel's main adversary is Rand Leavitt, adventurer, mining boss, elected judge, and self-appointed vigilante chief, who makes a daring bid to reap the lion's share of the rich golden hoard in spite of the fact that the three Emerson brothers were the original locators of the Thunder Mountain bonanza.

Kalispel is not without friends. He gets wise counsel from the Easterner, Blair, with whose daughter Kalispel is infatuated: friendship from honest young miner Dick Sloan; affection from a pretty dance-hall girl called "Nugget"; and confidential information from old ex-Ranger Bruce Masters. But guns alone can decide the issue with the wily Leavitt and his henchmen, chief of whom is Cliff Borden, the mining camp's leading purveyor of vice.

Forced to use all the resources of keen intelligence, cool determination, and gun-fighting fury which earned him respect on the Montana ranges, Kalispel lets his sixshooters speak out time and time again as he moves relentlessly ahead in quest of justice. Their staccato authority punctuates the sizzling action, one gun-duel succeeding another until, as Kalispel plays out the final hand, the long-ignored threats of Thunder Mountain are fulfilled.

THUNDER MOUNTAIN *appeared serially in* Collier's *in 1932 and was first published in book form in 1935. The story is considered, with good reason, to be one of Zane Grey's best. Will Cuppy, authority on adventure fiction, called it "lively and exciting."*



Thunder Mountain

By ZANE GREY

CHAPTER ONE

Strike!

A WARM spring rain melted the deep snows in the Saw Tooth Range, and a roaring flood poured down the headwaters of the Salmon River.

It washed out a colony of beavers, one of which, a crippled old female with a cub, fell behind the others and lost them. She came at length into a narrow valley where the stream meandered along a wide rocky bench wooded by stately isolated pines and fringes of willow and aspen.

The old mother beaver lingered with her cub near the mouth of an intersecting brook. In a sheltered bend under the looming mountain slope she began her labors. While the little cub played and splashed about she toiled industriously, cutting branches, carrying sticks, dragging rocks, and padding mud until she had bridged the brook and built a dam. A still pool rose behind the barrier.

One night when the afterglow of sunset loomed dull red upon the pool and the silence of the

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wilderness lay like a mantle upon the valley, the old beaver noticed a strange quivering ripple passing across the placid surface of her pool. There was no current coming from the brook, there was no breath of wind to disturb the dead calm. She noticed the tremors pass across the pool, she sniffed the pine-scented air, she listened with all the sensitiveness of a creature of the wild.

From high up on the looming mountain slope, from the somber purple shadow, came a low rumble, a thunder that seemed to growl from the bowels of the great mountain.

The old mother beaver did not wait to hear that again. With her cub she abandoned the quivering pool, and taking to the main stream she left the valley.

The last remnant of the Sheep-eater Indians pitched camp on the rocky bench across the stream from the abandoned beaver dam.

Outcasts from various tribes, they were fugitives and had banded together for protection, 51 in all, warriors, squaws and children, under the command of Tomanmo.

While the braves put up their lodges, the weary squaws unpacked meager supplies and belongings. The lame children, exhausted from continuous march, sat silent with somber eyes.

Tomanmo gazed up and down this valley to which he had been led by the Nez Percé member of his band. Long and hard had been the tramp hither and the last miles over solid rock. The soldiers could not track them here. It was a refuge. Deer and elk as tame as cattle grazed under the pines; white goats shone on the high bluffs of the south wall; mountain sheep stood silhouetted against the sky, watching the invaders of their solitude.

"We will hide here and rest. It is well," said Tomanmo to his band, and he sent hunters out to kill fresh meat.

When the chief sat down he found himself facing the north slope of the valley. Bare and steep, this slope, open to the south, slanted abruptly from the edge of the rocky bench some few hundred yards distant. What first attracted Tomanmo's curiosity was the fact that no game trail, not even a single track, marred the smooth surface of the incline. It sheered up a long way before its purple continuity was broken by a thin line of fir trees, pointing skyward like tufted spears. From there the color gray and the smooth surface broke to scantily timbered ledges that stepped up and up prodigiously, at last to turn white with snow on the skyline. Precipitous looming mountains were the rule in that range, and all the south slopes, where the snow did not long lie, were

bare of timber. But the endless south slope of this mountain showed no solid foundation of rock, no iron ribs of red granite, no bulge of cliff sheering up out of soft earth. Tomanmo shook his lean dark head.

Presently the Nez Percé approached the chief to open a skinny fist to his gaze. He held a handful of wet gravel and sand among which glinted bright specks.

"Ughh!" he ejaculated. "Gold!"

"Bad. White man come," grunted the chief.

"Some day, long after Sheepeaters gone," assented the Nez Percé.

The solemn, still day wore on. The pointed lodges of elk hide and the brush shelters, the columns of blue smoke rising upward, the active raven-haired squaws with their colored raiment flashing in the sun, the hunters dragging carcasses over the stones, the ragged hollow-cheeked children asleep on the ground—all attested to a settlement of permanent camp. Soon pots were steaming, fragrant viands broiled over the red coals, cakes of bread baked on the hot flat stones.

At sunset the band feasted. Only Tomanmo did not share the sense of well-being after long hardship. While he ate he watched the changing colors on the steep slope, the darkening purple at the base, the merging of gray into the gold-flushed snow, high on the peaks.

Dusk fell, and then silent night, with the dark velvet sky studded by cold stars. The fires burned low, gleaming red over the haggard visages of the sleepers. But Tomanmo did not sleep. He stalked to and fro, listening as a chieftain who expected the voices of his gods.

Tomanmo's ears, attuned as those of the deer to the whisperings and rustlings of the wild, registered other sounds. He sought out the sleeping Nez Percé and roused him with a moccasined foot.

"Come," said the chief, and led him away from the circle of dying fires and sleeping savages. "Listen."

For long there was nothing. The valley seemed dead. The mountains slept. The stars watched. Wild life lay in its coverts. Then there came a ticking of tiny pebbles down the slope, a faint silken rustle of sliding dust, a strange breath of something indefinable, silence, and then again far off, a faint crack of rolling rocks, a moan as of a subterranean monster trying to breathe in the bowels of the earth, and at last, deep and far away, a rumble as of distant thunder.

"Hear?"

The Nez Percé's somber eyes, mirroring the stars, dilated in answer. Tomanmo was assured that his own sensitive ears had

not deceived him.

"It is the voice of the Great Spirit," he said solemnly. "Tomanmo is warned. This mountain moves. When the sun shines we go."

Years later, long after Tomanmo had gone to join his forefathers, three adventuring prospectors, brothers named Emerson, toiled down into the valley from the south, and late in the day unpacked their weary burros and made camp.

"Reckon it's the place, all right," said Sam, the eldest. "Thet old Nez Percé gave me a clear hunch."

"Wal, I shore hope it ain't," replied Jake, the second brother, with a short grim laugh.

"Why?"

"Hell, man! Look around!"

Sam had been doing that avidly. The long valley, shut in by the rough red and green wall on the south, and the insurmountable and prodigious slope of talus on the north, evidently had taken his eye. But Sam was thinking of the isolation, the possibility of finding and working a gold claim without sharing it with other prospectors or being harassed by robbers. The dark caverned and notched wall on the east side, where the stream cut its way in cascades down to the valley, had a fascinating look to Sam Emerson. Those cliffs would hide gold-bearing ledges of quartz.

"Jake, I didn't befriend that poor old Injun for nothin'," replied Sam with satisfaction. "This is the valley."

"Wal, Sam, we never seen things alike, even as kids," rejoined Jake resignedly. "To me this is shore a hell of a hole. Gettin' out will be worse than gettin' in, an' that was a tough job."

"I'll grade out a trail if that's all you're rarin' about."

"It ain't all. It ain't even a little," retorted Jake. "This is a gloomy hole. The sun comes late an' leaves early. It'd be hotter'n hell in summer an' colder'n Greenland in winter. It's too far to pack in supplies. It's too lonely. Shore, I know you an' our gun packin' cowboy brother here like loneliness. But I like people. I like a barroom an' to set in a little game now an' then."

"Jake, thet last objection of yourn may soon remedy itself. You may see this valley hustlin' with miners an' a gold-diggin's town springin' up overnight like a mushroom."

"Wal, it won't last long, I'll gamble. Look at thet slope. Five thousand feet of silt an' gravel on end, fresh as if someone was diggin' above an' slidin' everythin' down. No grass, no brush, no trees! Nary a damn' rock! It's alive, Sam, thet slope is, an' some wet day it'll slide down an' obliterate this valley."

Sam was impressed and gazed up at the sinister slope. He had to tip his head far back to see the snow-patched summit.

"Queer lookin', at thet," he said. "But I reckon it's been there just as long as these other mountains."

Jake turned to the youngest brother, Lee, who stood leaning on his rifle, looking about with piercing hazel eyes. He was a stalwart young man with the lithe build of a rider.

"Wal, Kalispel," drawled Jake, "you ain't often stumped for speech. Are you linin' up with Sam in favor of this ghastly hole?"

"It's great, Jake."

"Ah-huh. Wal, just why? I reckoned you'd stand by me, consider'n' your weakness for horses, girls, an' such thet can't be had here."

"I like it, Sam. You know I don't care a heap about diggin' gold. Too darn' hard work for a cowboy! But I love the wildness an' beauty of this valley. It's a paradise for game. I'll bet I saw a thousand head of elk today. An' deer, bear, goat, sheep—even lions, in broad daylight! I'll hunt game while you fellows hunt gold."

"Humph! Sam, what do you think of Kal's shiftin' to your side?"

"All proves I was right draggin' Lee off thet bloody Montana range," replied the eldest brother forcefully. "I feel relieved 'cause he won't be lookin' for thet hard-lipped sheriff an', for all we know, some more of them ridin' gents. Rustle some firewood an' water now while I unpack."

Lee Emerson, nicknamed Kalispel by the first outfit he had ever ridden for in Montana, laughed at his loquacious brothers, and laying aside his rifle for a bucket, he made for the stream. It was a goodly current of water, dark green in color, still high and somewhat roily from melting snow. In places it was running swiftly, in others tarrying in pools formed by huge boulders. Kalispel stepped out on a sandbar and filled the pail with water as cold as ice. As an afterthought then, Kalispel scooped up a handful of wet sand. He saw grains of gold glistening in it.

"By thunder!" he ejaculated. "As easy as that! Sam will be wild. I'll let him discover it. I wonder—minin' might beat runnin' cattle. Reckon I was sick of the range."

Thoughtfully he returned to camp. There seemed to be a vague portent in connection with their arrival in this wild valley. Jake came staggering in under an enormous load of dead wood. Sam had spread supplies out on a tarpaulin and was awaiting the water to mix dough.

"About a week's rations, not counting meat," he said. "If we make a strike here two of us will

have to go to Salmon an' pack in grub."

"Ah-huh. An' if we don't strike it we'll starve?" Jake answered humorously.

Sam had no answer for that and silence fell upon the trio. Kalispel performed what camp tasks offered and lastly unrolled his canvas and blanket in the lee of a fallen pine. Next he found a bit of soap in his bag and a towel that resembled a coal sack. Repairing to the stream, he enjoyed a wash in the icy water. After that he sat down to wait for supper.

The valley changed every hour. Shadows were dusking the far corners. He saw a black bear amble along the lower reaches of the stream where it turned into the dark canyon. A herd of deer had come down off the south slope. Eagles soared above the sunlit crags. The upper third of the north slope blazed with gold and the snowy summit had a rosy flush. The place had a fascination for Kalispel that he could not define in a moment. The longer he gazed the more he appreciated things not strikingly noticeable at first.

On all sides the formidable walls frowned down. White and black tips of mountains peeped above the ramparts. Purple veils deepened in the notch where the valley turned to the east. He had thought at first glance that the valley headed at the eastern end, but he decided that the stream split there, one fork leaping down off the ledges, and the other turning with the narrow valley into a defile. It was a big country, just what his gaze encompassed, and incredibly rough on the heights. The gold faded up off the north slope and the whole atmosphere changed as if by magic. The steely grays and blacks stole upward out of the valley as if now free of their arch enemy. And night was at hand.

Kalispel thought that he would find enough loneliness there even for him. Not often did he yield to the memory of the past. But he did so now. No doubt his brothers Sam and Jake had found him in the nick of time—otherwise that wild Montana range where he had gone the pace of hard cowboys soon would have seen his end.

Still, Kalispel could excuse it all to himself. His serious blunders, his shooting scrapes, his defections which, if continued, would have made him an outlaw, he could trace to circumstances for which he was not to blame. What Kalispel had longed for was a little ranch with cattle and horses of his own, a wife to keep him straight, and a chance to realize the promise he knew he possessed. But he never could save a dollar; his several attempts to gather a herd of cattle had led to questions he could answer only with a gun; and nothing but trou-

ble had ever come of the girls who had attracted him.

His brooding reflection was interrupted by a low rumble of thunder.

"Say! So early in spring?" he muttered, looking up in surprise. The sky was clear and cold, already showing tiny pale stars. "That was an avalanche somewheres. Strikes me these Saw Tooths might cut loose a lot that way."

He returned to camp and the blazing fire. Jake was lighting his pipe with a red ember. Sam bent his ruddy bearded face over some task.

"Did you fellows hear thunder?" asked Kalispel.

"Shore did," replied Jake. "Sam says it wasn't thunder."

"Slide somewhere, then?"

"Son, thet wasn't thunder or slide," answered Sam, looking up. "My Nez Percé friend told me we'd know the place when we came to a valley under a high white mountain lace thet talked. I reckon we've found it."

"How do you account for that rumble?"

"Damn' if I know yet. Must be earthquake."

"Nix," said Jake. "Thet was just a slide rumblin' down somewheres."

"Wal, what's the odds one way or another—if there's gold here."

"Suits me. The spookier the better," returned Kalispel and sought his bed.

He listened for a while, but the rumbling sound was not repeated. Then he fell asleep. When he awakened it was broad daylight with rosy flush upon the peaks. His brothers were bustling about camp. The ringing bugle of an elk brought Kalispel to a sitting posture, wide awake and thrilling.

"Kal, go out an' bust thet bull," said Jake. "The valley's alive with game. Seems different by day."

"Son, take a peep in that pan," called Sam sonorously.

Kalispel got up and pulled on his boots, then stretched his tall frame. Sam, impatient at his nonchalance, thrust the pan under his nose. Kalispel saw a thin layer of sand and gold, about half and half.

"Dog-gone! Looks like a strike," rejoined Kalispel lazily.

"Nothin' to rave about," replied Sam, setting the pan down. "But if we can find the lode thet came from, we're rich. You'll have the ranch your heart desires, an' a thousand hosses, an' ten thousand cattle before the year is out."

"Rich!" ejaculated Kalispel incredulously.

"We'll sell out for a million. An' damn me, I've a hunch we've struck it this time. But even if we can't find the lode there are good diggin's all up and down this bench, one way or another!"

"Sam, are you talkin' sense?"

"Kal, he's been up since day-

break roarin' around," interposed Jake.

"If it doesn't turn out my luck to have other prospectors driftin' in here," muttered Sam somberly. "Thet has happened before."

"What difference would it make, Sam, if we located first?" asked Kalispel.

"Wal, a lot. If we can't find the lode we can clean up a fortune off this bench—giving us time."

"Ah-huh. Sam, do you trust thet Nez Percé?" added Jake, scratching his stubbly chin.

"You bet. He'll not tell. An' let's not borrow trouble. We ought to be singin'. Come on an' eat. After thet we'll set to work. We'll move our camp out of these rocks. There's a likely sheltered spot across the stream. Kal, you fetch in some meat an' hang it up in the shade. Then you might scout around a bit. Have a look at the outlet of this valley. Jake, you stick your pan in every sand an' gravel bar along this stream. I'll take a pick an' look for the lode."

Kalispel found it impossible not to respond to Sam's forceful optimism. Sam was a born prospector. Always seeing the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow! And he had never made a real strike. On more than one occasion he had almost had fortune in his grasp. This time would probably end like all the others. Yet Kalispel felt himself profoundly stirred by his eldest brother's inevitableness. Kalispel did not have the gold fever in his blood. He was not given to false hopes. But he responded to the thrill.

When camp had been moved to a pretty sheltered spot, Kalispel took his rifle and made off for the widest part of the valley. He had gone quite a distance when a small group of deer, does and fawns, trooped out of the brush to stand at gaze, long ears erect. As he approached them they bounded away as if on springs. Soon after that he sighted a buck, which he shot. It was too heavy to pack into camp, so he dressed it on the spot, and carried in the choicest quarters.

Retracing his steps, he halted in a sunny spot with fragrant sage all around, and there he flung himself at length as had been his wont so often on the cattle range. He liked the intimacy of the great walls. The monotonous purple reaches of the Montana ranges had palled upon him.

"Dog-gone!" soliloquized Kalispel. "I'd like to settle in this country."

When he returned to the camp he found it deserted. Evidently neither Sam nor Jake had been in since morning. That augured well for this first day. Kalispel set to work at camp tasks, pausing once to laugh when he heard himself whistling. He put things in shipshape halting only for the

mixing of biscuit dough at which he was a signal failure. But he liked to swing an ax, which art he had mastered during his boyhood along the hardwood creek bottoms of Missouri.

Meanwhile the colored lights of the valley had succumbed to waning afternoon. Kalispel began to grow anxious about his brothers. Presently Jake appeared some distance up the stream. He looked a tired man. Kalispel halloed and waved. Jake made a weary response. Upon nearer view Jake was a sight to behold. He was the dirtiest, muddiest, wettest, raggedest object of a man Kalispel had ever seen. He carried under his arm his gold pan and in his left hand something small and heavy wrapped in a bandana handkerchief.

"Dog-gone-it, Jake!" ejaculated Kalispel, undecided whether to laugh or whoop. Then as Jake staggered into camp, Kalispel met a wonderful look in his eyes.

"Boy, looka here," panted Jake, and he forced the bandana into Kalispel's hands.

The contents were soft, wet, heavy, significant to the touch. Kalispel knew what it contained without being told, and suddenly he was mute. Jake fell on his knees beside his pack and began to fumble around in it.

"Whar's my weighin'-scales? Gotta have them!—Ah-ha! Kal, cluster around now an' pour out thet gold."

Kalispel did as he was bidden, and as the tiny golden stream of grains and nuggets thudded into the scales he became aware of trembling hands and knocking heart. Three times the scales had to be emptied before all the gold could be weighed.

"Ten ounces—an' over," boomed Jake, breathing thickly. "At eighteen dollars the ounce—hundred an' eighty dollars! An' as Sam ordered, I only panned one pan at each bar."

"Gosh!" ejaculated Kalispel incredulously. He fingered the shiny nuggets, some of which were as large as peas. All were smooth and worn due, no doubt, to the action of water and gravel. A great part of the gold was like fine sand, and it slipped from Kalispel's palm in a yellow stream.

Suddenly he let out such a cowboy yell as had never pealed from his lungs. "*Whoopee!*" The stentorian sound rang along the walls and beat back in hollow echo. It was answered by a halloo from upstream.

"You hear that?" cried Kalispel.

"Shore. Thet was Sam—an' there he comes."

"Gosh! Is he drunk, staggerin' along like that?"

"Boy, Sam's packin' a heavy load—a rock."

"Rock! What'd Sam be packin' a rock for? He hasn't got his pick an' crowbar, either—*Jake!*"

"Boy, I reckon I'm a little weak on my pins." Jake sat down heavily.

Kalispel stared, his thoughts whirling. Sam came on sturdily, but manifestly under great physical strain. He plunged into camp to thump his heavy burden upon the ground in front of his brothers.

"Look at—thet!" he panted.

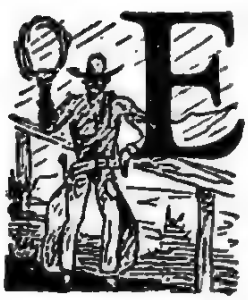
Kalispel saw a thick slab of white quartz brilliantly veined and belted with gold. It was the most beautiful inanimate object that he had ever beheld.

Sam wiped the sweat from his face, which betrayed traces of feeling. He now appeared calm, though his eyes held a singular effulgence.

"I went straight—to the lode—like steel to a magnet," he said, in cool, slowly expelled words. "Thar's five hundred dollars—in thet chunk. An' a million more—where it come from!"

Chapter Two

Trouble in Town



EXCITEMENT prevailed in the Emerson camp. Sam succumbed to some extent to the uncontained joy of his brothers. Jake declared it was a good thing that there was not any whisky in the packs. They fell over each other preparing supper and partaking of it. Jake could not decide what he wanted to do with his share. Lee had his ranch picked out, his herds, his horses, and he decided that a rich young cattleman, not bad-looking, might possibly find a wife.

Faint thunder came rumbling from the darkness.

"Ah-huh! Thar's the old man mountain grumblin' thet we ain't got the gold yet!" exclaimed Sam.

A menace seemed momentarily to hold the three in thrall. It passed, and with it the hilarity, the boyish indulgence in wild hope.

"Listen, boys," spoke up Sam seriously. "We've struck gold. Maybe I need to tell you thet the majority of prospectors who strike it rich never reap the profits of their discovery."

"Why'n hell not?" roared Jake, aghast, his rugged visage red in the firelight.

"It's just a fact, thet's all. Prospectors ain't business men. They're usually ignorant, heedless, improvident. They lose out somehow."

"We ain't gonna lose nothin'," declared Jake belligerently—he who had formerly been the most pessimistic. The gold fever had inflamed his brain. Kalispel looked on silently, conscious of a sinking sensation within his breast.

"Right here we form a company," went on Sam emphatically.

"Thet is, a company to work this quartz vein. Thet'll leave us free to take up placer-minin' claims on the bench. We want to pick out the three richest claims before the stampede."

"Stampede?" echoed Jake.

"Shore. They'll be a mad rush to this valley the day thet chunk of quartz is shown in Challis, Boise, or Salmon."

"I might have figgered thet," admitted Jake.

"Sam, why need anyone learn about the quartz vein?" queried Lee.

"It'll take a ten-ton stamp mill to work this mine."

"Ten-ton!" ejaculated Kalispel. "How on earth could such a mill be gotten here?"

"Packed in on mules. It can be done. It must be done. An' now you see why we must sell out, or sell a half interest, at least. We have no money."

"Why not keep the quartz mine secret while we work all this placer mine for ourselves?" asked Kalispel. "Then afterward sell out or finance the job ourselves?"

"Thet's a big idee," agreed Jake.

"It may be a good idee, but it's not good business. We want action. We'd risk everythin' to keep this quartz mine a secret. Because sooner or later, while we are workin' the placers, other miners will drift in. The Bitter Root range an' the Lemhi are full of them."

"Wal, let them drift," declared Kalispel. "We can take care of ourselves an' hang on to our holdin's. All the time we'll be diggin' gold while keepin' our best secret. Then, when we are forced to show our hand, all right. An' the situation will be precisely the same as it is now."

Jake and Kalispel argued with Sam. But he was obdurate, and at length out of deference to his superior experience and judgment they let him have his way. Whereupon they fell to discussing the other aspects of the case. Sam finally worked out a plan. He would stay in the valley, guarding the quartz mine, while working the placers along the stream. Jake and Kalispel were to trace the best trail possible out of the mountains and then make their way to Boise, where they would exhibit their quartz finding to prominent mining men, and consider no less than 100,000 dollars for a half interest, the contracting parties to furnish the mill, have it packed in, and work the mine. If a good deal could not be consummated at Boise, they were to proceed to Challis and Salmon.

Sam said he could stretch food supplies for a month and it would be necessary for one of the brothers, at least, to pack in before the expiration of that time. They settled all before going to bed at a late hour.

Kalispel could not sleep at

once. His mind was full. It seemed that the unlucky star under which he had always ridden had marvelously brightened And while he lay there the old mountain rumbled its faint deep thunder of warning.

On the following morning Kalispel and Jake, driving three lightly packed burros, headed up the valley on their important mission.

It took three days to reach the nearest town—Challis—where the brothers camped on the outskirts. After supper Jake made inquiries, and to his dismay ascertained that a stage for Boise did not leave until Saturday, and that the supplies needed must be brought from Salmon, 60 miles down the river.

Jake was a thoughtful man that night round the camp fire Finally he unburdened himself

"Lee, I didn't like leavin' Sam alone in thet hole. An' we can't go on to Boise, make this minin' deal, an' come back to Sam inside of a month. So here's what we'll do. I'll go on to Boise alone. Don't worry. I won't lose the quartz an' I'll be shore nobody gets a hunch about it. Reckon I'll not need more'n a few dollars till I make the deal. So you can have this money. You go to Salmon an' buy three more burros, an' all the supplies you can pack on them, an' rustle back to Sam. What you think of my idee?"

"It's a good one," replied Lee. "By the time I get to Salmon a week will be gone. It'll take a couple of days to outfit there. An' with six burros all loaded down, an' allowin' for the steep grades an' rough ground on that trail we worked out on—why, Jake, even with good luck I couldn't make it back to Sam in two weeks."

"You shore couldn't. Say a month. An' then you'll beat any cowpunchin' job you ever had. Wal, it's settled, an' I'm relieved."

Late afternoon of the second day, on the way down the river, Kalispel came to where the Salmon made a wide, slow bend. The several hundred acres of land inclosed by the stream in that circling constituted the ranch he had seen from a mountain top on the way in. From that far point he had made out several groves of cottonwoods, the wide, flat, brown and green fields, the fringe of trees bordering the river, the sheltered log cabin under the lea of the hill. But at close range this ranch appeared the finest prospect he had ever encountered.

A settler named Olsen lived there with his small family. Lee had supper with him and talked casually.

"Been prospectin'," he explained. "Don't care for it much. But I like ranchin'. Could you use a good cowman?"

"Huh! Got more work than I can do. Couldn't pay wages, though. Fact is I'd like to sell out."

"That's interestin'. What'd you take?"

"I'd hate to have some real money shoved at me," replied the settler tersely.

"So? Wal, if I strike pay dirt I'll come back an' shove some at you."

Next day, late, Kalispel trudged footsore and weary into Salmon. He had been there several times and he liked the place. It had been a mining town for years and had seen more than one gold boom. Even in dull times Salmon was a bustling center, being a distributing point between towns over the Montana line and those west into Idaho as far as Boise. Salmon resembled other Western mining towns in its one long, wide, main street, but off this thoroughfare it reminded Lee of some of the hamlets back in Missouri.

He found pasture for his burros and made a deal to secure three more, including packsaddles. Then he repaired to the main street and a lodging-house he knew. When former acquaintances failed to recognize him, Kalispel decided that he must be a pretty dirty, bearded, ragged, hard-looking customer. The best he could do that night was to wash and shave, which helped mightily, but he appreciated the fact that he must make a most advantageous deal in buying the supplies so that he would have money enough left for a new outfit. His boots had no soles and his trousers hung in tatters. He recalled a girl whose acquaintance he had made on a former sojourn in Salmon—what was her name?—and he could not present himself to her in this scarecrow garb.

Kalispel put on his coat, then had to remove it because he had slipped one arm through a rent instead of the sleeve. This was another rueful reminder of his poverty. He did not care about his appearance or even comfort while out on the range or in the wilds, but here in town among people he did not like his poverty. He blew out the lamp and left his room

In the yellow flare of a hall lamp he saw two figures at the head of the stairway—a young woman standing with her back toward him facing a man who had started down the steps and was looking back.

"Dad, please don't leave me alone. I—" she was entreating in a voice that would have arrested Kalispel even if her small, dark, graceful head had not.

"You'll be all right, Sydney," replied the man, with a laugh. "You're out West now and must look after yourself. I want to talk to some miners. Go to bed."

He stamped on down the rickety stairway. The girl partly turned as Kalispel passed her and he caught a glimpse of a pale, clean-cut profile, striking enough in that poor light to make him want to turn and stare. But he resisted the

desire and went quickly down wanting to get another look at the father of that girl. He caught an odor of rum. There was a barroom connected with this lodging-house, but there was no doorway opening into it from the hall. Kalispel followed the man outside, where at the street corner under the yellow lights he met several men in rough garb evidently waiting for him.

Kalispel approached them. "Howdy, men," he said, genially. "I'm a stranger hereabouts. Where can I eat?"

"Reckon I've seen you before," replied one, a keen-eyed, hard-visaged Westerner who apparently missed nothing in Kalispel's make-up, especially not the gun hanging low.

"Yeah? All the same I'm a stranger an' hungry," retorted Lee as he returned the searching scrutiny.

"Young fellow, there's a good restaurant a few doors below," replied the man Lee wanted a second glance at. He was beyond middle age, a handsome man with lined, weak face and dark eyes full of havoc. His frame was not robust and his garb betokened the tenderfoot.

"Thanks. Would you have a bite with me?" returned Kalispel.

"I had mine early."

"Say, cowpuncher, mosey along, will you?" broke in another of the trio of Westerners. He had a lean sallow face, a long drooping mustache and eyes that burned in the shadow of his sombrero.

That was sufficient to ignite the spark always smoldering in Lee's spirit.

"Why shore I'll mosey along—when I get ready," he replied curtly.

"Ain't you thet Kalispel cowboy late of Montana?" queried the man who had first spoken, as with a slight gesture he silenced his lean-jawed companion.

"Yeah, I happen to be that cowboy—Kalispel Emerson."

"Wal, no offense meant," rejoined the other hurriedly. "We jest want to talk business to Mr. Blair hyar. An' time's pressin'."

Kalispel did not trouble to reply. He fixed piercing eyes upon the tenderfoot who appeared to sense something amiss but could not gather what. "Excuse me, Mr. Blair, if I give you a hunch, usin' the advice I just heard you give your daughter. You're out West now an' must look after yourself."

With that pointed speech Kalispel wheeled to pass on down the street. "Dog-gone!" he soliloquized. "They'll fleece the socks off that tenderfoot. An' the wolf-jawed hombre—where'd I ever see him? Gambler, I'll bet. Wal, it's none of my mix. I've trouble of my own. But that girl—now—"

Kalispel went into the restaurant and in a few moments he was attending to the savory food set

before him.

Then, cheerful and responsive to exciting surroundings, he strode out to see the town. How many nights had he ridden in off the range to make up for the monotony of a rider's life! But a voice cautioned him to remember the importance of his mission. No bucking the tiger—not a single drop of red liquor! This somewhat subdued his exuberance. Still, he would have a look, anyhow, and to that end he made the rounds of the saloons, the gambling-dens and dance halls, winding up at the Spread Eagle, a composite resort at the edge of town on the bank of the river.

This place was in full blast, and as Kalispel went into the big barnlike, gaudily decorated dance hall, full of smoke and the merry roar of music and dancers, he experienced a thought that had come to him many a time before—it would be well for him to have an anchor. He liked this sort of fling, which he argued would be all right, if it were not for the drink and fights and worse that seemed to attend a lonesome cowboy's infrequent visits to town.

Presently, at the end of a dance, he saw a girl detach herself from a burly dancer to make her way in his direction. Kalispel had observed that, besides himself, there was not a young fellow in the hall. And this girl was hardly more than 16. She was little in stature, pretty in a birdlike way, with golden hair, and certainly was most inadequately clothed for such a cool night. She accosted Kalispel with a query as to where she had met him before.

"God only knows, sweetheart. I'm shore a rollin' stone."

"You're not one of these mining galoots?" she asked quickly. "I'll bet you're a grub-line cowpuncher out of a job."

"Plumb center, little girl. Gosh! but you're smart. An' you know the range, too."

"Put on your hat, unless you want to dance with me. I'm not used to bareheaded men," she returned testily, while she fastened penetrating blue eyes on him.

"I'd like to dance with you, but I'm too much of a ragamuffin."

"That's no matter. Come on."

"Besides, I've no money to buy drinks."

"I don't want to drink. I can't stand much. I hate these club-footed, rum-soaked miners who slobber over me and paw me. And I kind of like you, cowboy."

"Dog-gone it, I like you too," replied Kalispel dubiously, feeling a wave of the old loneliness surge over him.

She was about to put a hand on his arm when a pale-faced, somber-eyed man, approaching from behind Kalispel, with a slight gesture of authority, sent her hurrying away.

"Young fellow, you'll excuse

me," the stranger said. "Nugget is much in demand."

"Nugget?" queried Kalispel.

"Yes, Nugget. Nobody knows her real name."

"Ah-huh. Suppose I take this act of yours as an insult. Your Spread Eagle is open to all."

"Certainly, but not over cordial to tramps."

"Your mistake, mister, an' damned risky," flashed Kalispel. "If I had intended to dance with your Nugget—an' she asked me to—you'd be dancin' to dodge hot bullets with your feet right this minute."

Whereupon Kalispel lunged out of the glaring hall into the cold, dark night. It was getting late and the street was no longer crowded. He took to its center and made for his lodging-house. A familiar old sensation assailed him, a weakening, a sinking down, always in the past the precursor to a drinking debauch and a period of oblivion. But this had to be battled now. His status had changed. There was a fortune to be made and happiness to achieve. In that clarifying passionate moment of vision he saw the future, and it was like a picture, beautiful and golden and rosy.

He reached the tavern. Men were passing in and out of the crowded noisy saloon. Kalispel went into the hall and up the rickety stairway. The lamp burned brightly on the landing of the second floor. As he turned toward his door he heard a low agitated voice: "Get out—of here!"

He stopped short. That Blair girl whom her father had called Sydney! A man's voice, hurried and sibilant, answered her. "Ssssh! Someone will hear. Listen to me—"

"No! Get out of my room!" she cried, her voice poignant with anger and fear.

Kalispel saw that her door was ajar. In two long strides he reached it and with forceful hand shoved it open violently. The act disclosed a tall man starting back from this sudden intrusion, and a white-faced girl, with dark eyes distended in fear, in the act of slipping off her bed. She was clad in a long nightgown and with one hand held the edge of a blanket to her breast. A lighted lamp stood on a little table close to her bed; a book lay face open on the floor.

"Pardon, lady," said Kalispel curtly. "Did I hear you order someone from your room?"

"Yes—you did," she replied.

"All a mistake. I got in the wrong room," spoke up the man with a short laugh that betrayed little concern for this intruder but considerable annoyance at the intrusion. He had to brush by Kalispel to get out the door.

"It was not a mistake," spoke up the girl hotly. "He came in. I asked if it were Dad. He saw me—in bed—reading. I ordered him

out. Twice! But he—he came toward me."

"Aw, nonsense!" rasped the man, halted by her accusation to confront Kalispel. He had bold eyes that gleamed, a protruding, clean-shaven jowl, a forceful presence "She's a tenderfoot, scared silly because I happened to open her door instead of mine."

"Ah-huh. Why didn't you step out quick when you saw the lady in bed?" demanded Kalispel.

"I was going to."

"Say, I heard her order you out. Twice!"

"Look here, are you questioning me, you—"

"Not any more," interrupted Kalispel. "But I'll take a whack at you."

A sharp left-handed blow sent the man staggering back off his balance. He might have gained his equilibrium, but Kalispel leaped after him and swung a terrific right to that prominent jaw. The sudden blow knocked him against the railing which gave way with a crack He went down the stairway, to fall with a resounding crash to the floor below. The jar that accompanied the crash brought the trample of heavy boots and excited voices of men entering below.

"Lady, shut your door," called Kalispel and whipped out his gun.

"It's Borden," rang out a hoarse voice. "Dead—or damn' near it!"

"Back of his head all bloody," spoke up another man. "Must have been hit with an ax. Holdup, mebbe. Thet Casper outfit in town. He had a big roll on him. I seen him flash it today. Search him, boss."

"Hold the lamp, somebody—Nope—no holdup. Here's his money an' watch."

"He's not dead, either. He's comin' to."

Kalispel stepped to the head of the stairway. "Hey, down there!" he called. "Who is that man?"

"What man?"

"Why, the one I just rapped gently on the chin."

"Ha! It must have been orful gentle, stranger."

"Wal, who an' what is he?"

"His name's Cliff Borden. An' he's well known hyar. Part owner of the Spread Eagle. Buys minin' claims, an'—"

"Forces his way into a young lady's bedroom," interrupted Kalispel scornfully. "An' wouldn't get out when she ordered him out. Now listen, you Salmon gentlemen. Drag Mister Borden out of this lodgin'-house an' when he comes to his senses tell him he'd better steer clear of me."

"An' who might you be, young fellar?" queried the gruff leader below.

"My name is Emerson an' I hail from Kalispel."

A whispering ensued which soon gave place to the clearer voices of men engaged in lifting and carry-

ing Borden out of the house.

After a moment Kalispel sheathed his gun and stood irresolute. Should he not assure the girl that the incident was past? The fact of her door being ajar emboldened him, and he knocked.

"Who is there?"

"It's me, Miss Blair."

The door opened wide. Kalispel had intended to inform the girl that all was well, but sight of her sent his thoughts whirling. She had thrown a dressing-gown over her shoulders, the effect of which enhanced a beauty he had only faintly grasped upon first sight.

"Oh! Is—is he dead?" she faltered, with great, dark eyes upon him.

"Goodness no, miss!" exclaimed Kalispel hastily. "I only hit him. Shore he fell hard an' must have busted his head below. They said it was all bloody. Don't you fear for him, miss. He's not hurt much."

"You misunderstand me. I don't fear for him. I wouldn't care—if—if you had killed him."

"Aw, now!" ejaculated Kalispel, staring. A flush came over the whiteness of her cheek. Her face was the loveliest thing Kalispel had ever gazed upon.

"I thank you for saving me—I—I don't know what," she said tremulously.

"Maybe it wouldn't have been so bad as it looked," replied Kalispel lamely. "He might have made a mistake about your door—an' then, after he was in—just lost his head, you know—which wouldn't be no wonder."

"You are generous to him, and —and—" she replied suddenly checking her reply and blushing scarlet. "But I should tell you that he followed me today. He spoke to me twice. He knew this was my room."

"I stand corrected, Miss Blair," returned Kalispel. "It will be just as well for Mr. Cliff Borden to keep out of sight tomorrow."

"I heard what you told those men to tell him."

"Yes? I'm sorry. That wasn't nice talk for a girl new to the West."

"I'm new, all right," she breathed, almost passionately. "I'm a most atrocious tenderfoot—and I —I hate this West."

"I'm terrible sorry to hear that, miss," replied Kalispel earnestly. "It's shore tough on newcomers. I know. I came from Missouri years ago. But you'll love it some day— Here I am keepin' you up! I only wanted to tell you everythin' was all right."

"But it's not," she said. "There's no lock on my door. That's why I was reading while waiting for Dad. His room is next to mine. Only he stays out so late. And he comes in—"

"You'll be all right. Never mind when your dad comes in. Shut your door tight an' brace it with

a chair under the knob. My room is just at the head of the stairs. An' havin' been a cowboy, I sleep with one eye open. I'd hear if a mouse came sneakin' up this hall."

"Thank you," she replied shyly. "I will see you tomorrow. Good night, Mr. Kalispel."

He bade her good night and went to his room to light his lamp and sit upon his bed, for long so absorbed that he had no idea where he was nor what he was doing.

Around midnight Kalispel heard voices below in the lower hall. He opened his door slightly. Blair had evidently been accompanied back to the lodging-house by his Western acquaintances. Kalispel heard him stumble over the broken steps and come up, breathing heavily, to open and close a door. Kalispel undressed and went to bed.

He was up early, the first to await breakfast in the restaurant. From there he went to the largest store in town and presented his list of supplies, and told how he wanted them packed for a hard trip into the mountains. His next errand was out to the pasture. This proved to be unfruitful, as the owner was in town, whereupon Kalispel went back.

He remarked to himself that he had seen the sun shine before, he had seen the pearly, fuzzy buds opening on the willows, he had been out on many and many a cold sparkling spring morning with the gold and rose on the hills; but no morning nor one of the things he noted had ever been so beautiful and heart-swelling as now.

"Must of been Sam's gold strike," he mused as he swung along. But he knew that was a lie.

In front of the tavern he encountered Blair talking to the proprietor and another man.

"Here's your Kalispel fellar now," said the former.

"Kalispel?—I met this young man last night," returned Blair. "How do you do, sir? It appears I'm indebted to you for a service in my daughter's behalf."

"Mornin'. Nothin' a-tall, Mr. Blair," replied Kalispel. "Some gazabo named Borden had been annoyin' Miss Blair all day. An' last night he busted into her room. I happened to be goin' up an' heard her order him out. But he didn't come, so I investigated."

"Haw! Haw!" laughed the proprietor. "Who's gonna pay for the damage to my stairs?"

"Damn' if I will. You make Borden pay," retorted Kalispel.

"I'll gladly foot the bill," interposed Blair hurriedly. "Young man, I'm greatly obliged to you. Excuse me if I persist. Sydney, my daughter, told me about it. Very different from your version. She's very much worried this morning. She fears there'll be a fight."

"Mr. Blair, your daughter did-

n't waste any fears on Borden last night. She'd been glad if I had shot him."

"Maybe so. But now it'd distress her—and me too—if Borden and you—"

"Not much chance, Mr. Blair," interrupted Kalispel shortly. "I know his stripe."

The proprietor interposed. "Wal, young fellar, with all due respect to your nerve I'm givin' you a hunch somethin' will come of it. But sure I don't need to tell *you* to keep an eye peeled." After this trenchant speech he went indoors with his companion.

"Here's my daughter now," spoke up Blair.

Kalispel turned to see a slender, graceful young woman almost at his elbow. He did not recognize her. But the shy greeting she gave him, the blush that suffused her face, the way she slipped her hand under Blair's arm, appeared to establish the fact that she was his daughter.

He doffed his ragged sombrero in some embarrassment. "Mornin', lady. I shore hope you slept well," he said.

"Not so very well," she replied.

In the bright sunshine, Kalispel discovered that the girl's hair was of a chestnut-gold color, and the eyes which he had imagined matched her dark tresses were violet in hue. In her street clothes she seemed taller, too.

"What's your name?" asked Blair.

"Emerson. Lee Emerson. I got the nickname Kalispel out on the Montana range."

"Pray overlook my curiosity, Emerson. There seems to be an idea in this town that you're—what did they call it?—a bad hombre. Last night, one of those men you met with me—Pritchard—he gave you a hard—"

"Pritchard!" interrupted Kalispel sharply. "I knew I'd seen him somewhere. Mr. Blair, that man is a gambler—a shady customer. Look out for him an' all of them. Don't drink with them, or gamble, or consider any deals whatsoever."

"Thanks. I'll admit I'd grown a little leery. There might be a reason for Pritchard calling you a bad hombre."

"Aw, I am a bad hombre," admitted Kalispel coldly. "But that's no reason why I can't do a good turn for newcomers to the West."

"May I ask just what *is* a bad hombre?" inquired Sydney Blair, her disturbing violet eyes searching his.

"It's no compliment, Miss Blair, I'm sorry to say," replied Kalispel, returning her intent glance.

"Don't embarrass him, Sydney," said Blair. "See here, Emerson. I've got considerable cash on my person. Is it safe for me to carry it around?"

"I should smile not. If you're going to be here after dark, put

your money in the bank pronto."

"Thanks. That's straight talk. I'll ask you another. I came West to go into a mining deal with a Boise man, a promotor named Leavitt. I met Pritchard on the stage coming from Bannock. I told him. He discouraged me. And he and his partners are endeavoring to interest me in mining enterprises here. What do you think of it?"

"Highway robbery, in the majority of cases. Of course some minin' claims pan out well. But if I were you I wouldn't risk it."

"Emerson, I'll go deposit my money in the bank at once. Then I'll want to talk to you again."

"All right, Mr. Blair. I'll be around town today an' I reckon most of tomorrow," called Kalispel after him as he hurried away.

"I'd like to talk to you, too," said the girl. "We are strangers, and I'm beginning to realize we're such tenderfeet. Won't you come somewhere with me, so we can talk? Not in here. How about the restaurant? It's lunch time and I haven't had any breakfast."

"You'd go to lunch with me—even after I've admitted I'm a bad hombre?" he asked smiling at her.

"Yes, I would. You don't seem so—so very bad to me," she replied, returning the smile.

"But I shore look disreputable," he protested.

"I haven't seen any dressed-up

Westerners yet," she rejoined demurely, and with a flash of eyes took him in as far down as the cartridge-studded belt and swinging gun. "Perhaps you mean—that," she went on. "It is rather fearful. . . . Please come. I don't care what your reputation is. I *know* there's no reason why I—I should be ashamed to—to—"

"How do you know, Miss Blair?" he interposed gravely.

"I— You— Well, it's the way you look at me."

"Miss Blair, I've been a pretty wild cowboy, but there's no reason I can't look you straight in the eyes."

"Well then, what else matters?"

"But mine's a Westerner's point of view," he rejoined soberly, driven to stand clear in his conscience before this girl. "For a range rider in these days, rustlin' a few cattle, gamblin'-hells an' dance-hall girls—red liquor an' gun-play—all in the day's work!"

"It's honest of you to tell me," she said, losing her color. "I'm sorry I forced you to. But if I am to live in this—this beautiful, terrible West, I must learn. I must meet people—see things. I feel so—so lonely, and you're the only person I've met that I've wanted to talk to. Won't you come?"

And that was how Kalispel Emerson found himself seated at a table in the corner of the little restaurant opposite this lovely violet-eyed girl. He accepted the miracle and tried to battle against his sensations, to be worthy for the moment of the trust she placed in a stranger and to help her. Ordering the lunch from the waitress took a little time and added to his composure, after which he faced the girl across the table.

"I am Sydney Blair," she began impulsively. "You may not believe that I'm only nineteen. We are from Ohio. Owing to an unsatisfactory partnership and poor health, my father decided to sell out his business and go West. I was the only child. My mother is dead. I had a—a—something happen to—that made me want to leave Ohio forever."

"Miss Blair, that's to the great gain of the West," he replied gallantly, as she hesitated. "People come out here from everywhere—to begin anew, to make the West what it will be some day. I reckon you feel lonesome an' homesick an' scared. It's hard on young women—this West, especially if they are pretty like you. But you'll learn to stand what seems so rough an' crude now—you'll fit in, an' some day love it. Reckon I speak for all Westerners when I say I just can't be sorry you came."

"It's not so much to me just now—my comfort, my adapting myself to new people and conditions. It is concern for my father. He has responded strangely to Western influences that we knew nothing of. He drinks, he gambles, he makes friends with any and everyone he meets. He leaves me alone at night, as you know. And I am beginning to worry myself sick over what to do."

"Ah-huh. An' that's why you wanted to talk to some one," replied Kalispel kindly. "Wal, that happens to 'most every man who comes out here. In your case, Miss Blair, you've got just two things to do to keep him from goin' plumb to hell."

"Oh!— What are they?"

"You must get hold of his money an' hang on to it."

"Yes. I thought of that myself. I can do it. What's the other?"

"Let him get to hard work at whatever his heart is set on."

"It is this gold-mining. Dad is mad about that. Please tell me all about it."

Kalispel did not need to draw upon imagination or hearsay to acquaint the young woman with the facts. He painted a graphic picture of the hardships, the failures of thousands of gold seekers to the fortune of one, the rough camp life, the wildness of the gold diggings. And despite his deliberate sticking to realism, upon the conclusion of his discourse he found himself gazing into such radiant, shining eyes that he was

astonished.

"Oh, I would like that!" she cried.

He spread wide his hands, as if to indicate the hopelessness of tenderfeet and his inability to discourage this one. Then suddenly a query flashed into his mind—why not induce Blair and his daughter to go back with him into the mountains and share with him and his brothers the marvelous opportunity there?

Soon they were out on the street again, Kalispel biting his tongue to keep back a rush of eloquence, and Sydney babbling away as if the hour had made them friends.

Halfway to the tavern they encountered Blair. "Sydney, where have you been?" he queried. His face and demeanor betrayed agitation.

"I took Mr. Emerson to lunch," she replied gayly. "We had a—Dad, what is the matter?"

"Emerson, you are being hunted all over town," declared Blair hastily.

"Ah-huh," replied Kalispel. His wary eye had noted a circle of men in front of the tavern. On the moment it split to let out Borden and a wide-sombreroed individual with a star prominent upon his vest. Kalispel recognized him and cursed under his breath.

"Blair, take your daughter inside—pronto," he called tensely, and striding up the sidewalk, he faced the crowd.

Chapter Three

Kalispel Calls a Bluff

BORDEN'S bold front altered manifestly in his swerving aside. The crowd, too, split behind the two men, the larger half going out into the street and the smaller half lining against the walls of the buildings. These significant moves had their effect upon the sheriff. He slowed down, then halted.

"Howdy, Kalispel," he called in a loud voice.

"Not so good, Lowrie," replied Lee bitingly, and he stopped within 15 steps of the sheriff. "Kinda sore these days."

"You're under arrest."

"Say, man! Are you gettin' dotty in your old age?" rejoined Kalispel derisively. "You didn't arrest me in Montana. How can you do it in Idaho?"

"I was sworn in this mornin'."

"Bah! You can't bluff me. You couldn't be sworn in short of Boise."

"Wal, I've been deputized by citizens of Salmon. An' I'm arrestin' you an' takin' you back to Montana."

"What for?"

"Rustlin' cattle," returned Lowrie hoarsely.

Kalispel leaped as if he had been stung. His face flamed red and then turned white.

"I shore did I admit it. I'm proud of it. But what *kind* of rustlin' was that, Hank Lowrie? I helped steal cattle from the outfit who first stole cattle from mine. Why, that kind of rustlin' is as old as the range! Nothin' but an exchange of beef!"

"Wal, you followed up thet exchange by spillin' blood, didn't you?" queried Lowrie sarcastically.

"Forced on me, damn you! An' you know it. Your lousy K-Bar foreman hounded me all day. He was drunk an' crazy. I had to meet him. At that it was an even break. An' there's some decent Montana cowmen who patted me on the back for doin' it. I left Montana to save my outfit from fightin' on my account."

"Thet's your story, but—"

"It's true," interrupted Kalispel in ringing passion. "An' you're a liar!"

Borden propelled himself into the argument by advancing a couple of nervous strides and exploding furiously, "Lowrie, are you going to arrest this cowboy beggar?"

"Shore I am," replied the sheriff gruffly.

"Like hell you are!" rang out Kalispel contemptuously.

"Handcuff the bully!" shouted Borden, his discolored face ugly with ungovernable fury.

"Shet up," rasped Lowrie, giving way to more than exasperation. Uncertainty sat visibly upon him.

"Put irons on me? Why, you damn fools! Where is this bluff goin' to get you?"

"Emerson, I'm arrestin' you. If you submit peaceful I'll take you along without irons. We're goin' on the noon stage. An' this time tomorrow you'll be under the roof of a Montana jail."

Kalispel believed he had gauged his man correctly. But slowly he froze to the consciousness that he might be wrong and that Lowrie, egged on by Borden and his stand before the gaping crowd, might try to go through with it. Kalispel sank a little in his tracks and stiffened, all except his quivering right hand, now low at his side.

"Lowrie, long before tomorrow you'll be under the sod—if you press this deal any farther."

Lowrie edged a foot forward.

"Look out!" cried Kalispel piercingly. Then, as the other became like an upright stone, Kalispel went on coldly: "Old-timer, if you'd moved your hand then, instead of your foot, it'd been all day with you."

"What!" bellowed the sheriff. "You'd draw on—me?"

"I'd kill you!"

Lowrie's visage turned an ashy white. It was plain that he had not expected resistance, let alone a deadly menace that held the spectators rooted in their tracks. A moment of intense suspense passed. Then Kalispel relaxed out of

his crouch.

"I had you right, Lowrie. You're just what they call you in Montana—a blowhard sheriff, yellow to your gizzard. Now get out of Salmon. If you don't, an' I run into you again, you throw a gun or I'll shoot your leg off."

"I'm not matchin' gun-play with a killer," replied Lowrie hoarsely.

"No? Then what the hell kind of a sheriff are you in these days? Rustle now."

Lowrie wheeled as on a pivot and rapidly strode down the street. Borden backed away as if desirous of losing himself in the crowd.

"Hey, you! Hold on!" called Kalispel.

Borden turned a distorted face expressive of an impotent wrath.

"Did you get a message from me last night?" demanded Kalispel.

"No," replied Borden harshly.

"Wal, I sent one. An' here it is—you steer damn' good an' clear of me."

"Emerson, you add insult to injury," fumed Borden, his pale eyes glaring. "Last night you assaulted me for something I was innocent of. A mistake—I opened the wrong door. An accident misunderstood by a tenderfoot girl scared out of her—"

"Accident, hell!" shouted Kalispel, just as keen to have the crowd hear as was Borden. "You hounded that girl all day yesterday. She told me so. Then late at night you busted into her room. An' you wouldn't leave till I heard her an' went in to drive you out. I should have shot you. Forcin' yourself into the bedroom of a lady at midnight! I never learned rotten cuss-words enough on the range to fit you. So I won't try. But you steer clear of me. If I get the littlest chance in the world, I'll shoot you."

Borden hurriedly shouldered his way through the crowd and disappeared. Kalispel stood there at the edge of the sidewalk running his eyes over the faces turned his way. He espied Blair and his daughter in the entrance of a hallway just opposite his position. The girl's pale face and wide dark eyes proved that she had seen and heard the encounter with Lowrie and Borden. It had been a bad enough situation without that. Kalispel experienced a sickening reaction. What miserable luck dogged him! What kind of an unfavorable opinion would the girl have of him now?

On the moment, when this thought waved hot over him, he glanced back at the hallway. Blair was emerging with his daughter. She was still staring as if fascinated at Kalispel, and catching his eye she nodded with a wan little smile. They passed on into the lodging-house. That smile held hope for Kalispel. He stood there on the spot until the crowd dis-

persed. Then he strode off with the idea forming in mind to hurry his purchases, pack, and leave town before nightfall.

He found that the additional three burros had been acquired for him, but packsaddles were in the process of repair and would not be finished until the morrow.

The fact that the man from whom Kalispel got the burros offered to let him have a horse and saddle on credit put a different light on the journey back to the gold claim. A sure-footed, staunch horse could travel where packed burros could go. He gratefully accepted the offer.

When he returned to the lodging-house and went to his room, he espied something white on the floor just inside the threshold. He stared. It was an envelope. Picking it up, Kalispel found it open and un-addressed. A faint perfume assailed his nostrils, and recognizing it, he experienced a swift, strong vibration all through him. With clumsy, shaking hands he extracted the folded sheet of paper from the envelope and spread it out in the glare of the lamp. The page was covered with fine, even, graceful handwriting.

Dear Mr. Kalispel:

Father and I saw and heard everything. If it had not been you, it would have been a show for us. But I was terrified. I thought you were going to fight them, and I was divided between sudden hate for that pompous, beady-eyed sheriff and fear for you. Not until I was safely here in my room and could think did I realize that you *weren't in much danger. I also found that I had caught a glimpse of the other gentleman's discolored face, which somehow afforded me a peculiar satisfaction.*

However, the purpose of this note is to assure you that I did not believe one word the sheriff said, and—please do not leave town without seeing us again. I feel directly responsible for Borden's having put the sheriff after you. Likewise I am elated that he failed to arrest you. I want to entreat you, despite this newborn savage something in me, to avoid meeting either of those men, for my sake.

Won't you have supper with us tonight? You can tell father about gold mining.

Sincerely,
Sydney Blair.

Kalispel sagged against the bed and sat down limply. He read the note again. There was no doubting the written words that ran on so firmly and beautifully under his bewildered eyes.

"She didn't believe that liar," he whispered raptly. "She trusts me—she wants to see me again—she likes me. Aw, I'm plumb loco! She's just a little lady, too fine and kind to let me go off feelin' sick with shame an' disgrace. An' by heaven! that's too good for me!"

Kalispel took a few moments to wash his face and brush his hair, and then, blissfully oblivious of his ragged garb, he went out bareheaded to knock at Miss Blair's door.

"There he is now," announced her father. "Come in, Emerson."

Kalispel presented himself in the doorway and bowed. "Good evenin'," he said. "I'll be happy to have supper with you."

Miss Blair had changed the brown street dress to one of white and she looked so lovely to Kalispel that the blood rushed back to his heart with a shock.

"Oh, here you are!" she cried gayly. "Good evening. I—we feared you had run away—after that sheriff."

"No. I reckon I'm not much on runnin'. Fact is I shore forgot Lowrie," drawled Kalispel, growing cool now and sure of himself, conscious that the havoc had been wrought in him and glorying in it. "I've been out lookin' over my burros an' tryin' a new saddle horse."

"Go on down, Sydney. I'll catch you," suggested Blair.

"Of course horses are an old story to you," said the girl as she and Kalispel started down the stairs.

"I reckon. But I've never outgrown livin' that story. Do you ride, Miss Blair?"

"Yes. But I wouldn't take any prizes for horsemanship," she rejoined, with a laugh. "I'd love horses if I had a chance. Perhaps here in the West I may find it."

"How'd you like to ride a horse for days an' days out into those wild hills? Lonely camp fires at night! Meetin' never a soul, not even an Indian, on the way! Seein' deer an' elk an' bear so tame they stand to watch you ride by! Two hundred miles almost out into these beautiful mountains—an' then a valley like one in a dream —where you can scoop up gold by the handful!"

She turned in the yellow flare of the tavern light to look at him.

"Heavens! Don't torment me!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "But you're not teasing. You're serious. Oh, I would be mad with joy!"

Blair caught up with them before Kalispel could find a reply for Sydney's astonishing response.

"Emerson, I gather that the less said to you about today's little fracas the better," remarked Blair. "So all I'll say is that it tickled me. And it might not displease you to learn that at least a dozen men spoke to me about it—to your credit. Lowrie is partial to Mormon cattlemen, I hear. And Borden is not liked any too well in Salmon."

"Ah-huh. Well, I reckon it'd be kind of hard to displease me this minute," replied Kalispel with a laugh.

They entered the crowded restaurant, where a miner gave up

his table to them. Kalispel saw every man in that place before he followed the Blairs to their seats. Sydney was about to take the seat facing the room, when Kalispel intercepted her with a smile.

"Excuse me, lady," he drawled coolly. "Reckon you had better let me sit here. Maybe it's not strict etiquette, but it's important. You see—there are some poor devils who can't sit with their backs to a door."

"Oh—really?" she returned blankly, and then suddenly she understood. Her color paled, and when she took the chair he held for her it was with downcast eyes.

Presently, with the orders given, they were free to talk.

"Emerson, what have you been putting into my girl's head?" queried Blair.

Kalispel leaned his elbow on the table. "Blair," he began, "it'll cost you about fifty dollars for two horses an' saddles. An' about a hundred for supplies, beddin', tent for Miss Sydney, an' other stuff, not includin' trail clothes, guns, an' such. Say, an outlay of two hundred dollars at the most."

"What are you driving at?"

"Would you risk so much on the chance of a gold claim where you can dig your two-hundred-dollar investment in one day?"

"Emerson, are you serious?"

"I reckon. Never more in my life. This *is* serious, for me. I said *—in one day!*"

Blair turned to his daughter. "Sydney, is our new-found Western friend panning out like the others?"

"No, Dad. He's honest," she replied. Her bright, shining eyes did not need that warm, fascinated regard to complete Kalispel's undoing.

"No offense, Emerson," said Blair. "I was joking, of course. All the same, I'd take you or your word on Sydney's say-so any day."

"Thanks, Blair. But—Miss Sydney—do you give him your say-so?" rejoined Kalispel earnestly, and again he met the eloquent eyes.

"Yes."

"You trust—me?"

"I do trust you."

"But I'm a stranger. I've admitted I'm a bad hombre. You've had evidence of—of my wild range life."

"Are you trying to undermine the—the—"

"No. I only want to be sure. I reckon it's a pretty wonderful thing for me."

"I am out West now," she countered. But her eyes were intense.

"Meanin' you must level yourself to us Westerners. That's true. But if you really mean what you said—if you can believe me worth makin' a friend of—wal, I'll put something wonderful in the way of you an' your father."

"I do trust you—and I will go with you," she returned, paling

again.

"That makes this hour the biggest of my life," declared Kalispel, stern yet radiant. "Now listen," and he bent over the table to whisper. "Not many days ago my two brothers an' I struck gold over here in a valley of the Saw Tooth Mountains. It is rich diggin's. There'll be a million in gold dust panned out of that valley, an' no tellin' how much from the quartz lode.

"We left Sam there. My brother Jake has gone to Boise to sell a half interest in our quartz mine. We're askin' one hundred thousand. I am here to pack in supplies. We planned to keep the strike secret as long as possible. That won't be very long. Such strikes leak out. There'll be the wildest gold stampede Idaho ever saw. But we'll have time to clean up a fortune before the rush."

"My word!" ejaculated Blair incredulously. "Great! You sound like a book! No wonder you upset poor Sydney!"

"Blair, will you pack in there with me?" asked Kalispel.

"Will I? Say, do you mean accept a chance like this—on an outlay of a few hundred dollars?"

"I reckon that's what I mean."

"But why offer strangers such a wonderful opportunity?" asked Blair gravely.

"There's more gold than we can ever dig—an' the idea appeals to me."

"Have you fallen in love with my daughter?"

"Oh—Dad!" gasped Sydney. "How perfectly terrible of you! Kalispel—please don't mind his rudeness."

Kalispel suffered for her poignant embarrassment, but the feeling was nothing compared to the torment of his own emotions. He had laid a trap for himself. He wanted to base this whole interview and offer upon his honesty, his sincerity.

"Blair, you call my hand—pretty hard," he replied with strong agitation. "I—I reckon I have—but I mean I never knew it till this minute. That needn't make any difference to you an' Miss Sydney."

"Hell, as you Westerners say," exclaimed Blair frankly. "You needn't apologize for it. Lord knows I'm used to men falling in love with Sydney. She had three proposals on the way out here. Kalispel, shake on the deal."

"Wait. I've a little more to tell," returned Kalispel, deeply stirred. "Here's my story. I was born on a farm in Missouri. My mother died when I was little. My father married again. I wasn't happy after that. When I was fourteen I ran away from home. Joined a wagon train. At Laramie, Wyomin', I got in a fight an' left the wagon train. I'd been used to horses all my life an' naturally I became a cowboy. I rode all over

Wyomin', in some of the hardest outfits on the ranges. Then I drifted to Montana, an' the same applied there. My quickness with guns, my propensity to get in trouble, especially over some girl, earned me a name I wish I could shake.

"That range ridin' of mine lasted ten years. I'm nearin' twenty-seven now. My brothers Sam and Jake had been prospectin' gold in Montana. They got wind of my shootin' scrape at Kalispel, an' they hunted me up, an' persuaded me to quit the ranges. So I went with them, an' after long discouraging months we made this strike over here in the mountains. I can't see anything but a fortune for all of us. Wal, when I get mine, I'll buy a ranch. I have the place picked out up the Salmon. I'll settle in there an' live down this Kalispel name. Now that's about all. I just wanted you to know."

"Emerson, I appreciate your frankness and confidence," said Blair warmly. "You didn't say so, but I gather that you're not so black as you were painted. And here's my hand."

Sydney offered hers without hesitation. Kalispel could only press the soft little hand in his. In that moment he could not trust to speech.

"I thank you, too," she said softly. "I'm sure I understand your wish to tell us. This West must indeed be a savage, bloody country. But even if you had been wilder than you intimated—that would not mean anything to me. It is what you are *now!*"

Kalispel's heart swelled with the contact of her hand and the significance of her words. The future seemed to beckon with enchanted promise.

Kalispel turned often in his saddle to look back down the winding river road. Certain events the last day in Salmon had convinced him that Pritchard and his cronies had somehow found out he was taking the Blairs with him. But this was late in the second day of the journey and there had been no sign of men on their trail.

Blair lagged behind, changing from one side of the saddle to the other. He was rather heavy and unused to horseback. Now and then he got off to walk a little. Sydney rode ahead, driving the burros. Already she was a surprising success. Young, strong, supple, and vividly elated with this adventure, she made play and romance of what was really hard work. Then her appearance alone had transformed the world for Lee. In a light sombrero, with her dark hair hanging in a braid, and wearing red scarf; buckskin blouse, fringed gauntlets, overalls, and boots like any Western girl, to Kalispel she was an object of adoration.

Before sunset that day they ar-

rived at the widening of the valley and the ranch Kalispel had decided would be his some day. He particularly wanted to get Sydney's opinion of the place, and to that end he tried to keep from talking about it. Nevertheless, something she said, or the way she looked, prompted him to transgress.

"Wal, Lady, look the ranch over 'cause—who knows—you might be mistress of it some day," he drawled. He heard her catch her breath and then, a little too long afterward, she uttered a silvery peal of laughter.

It jarred on Kalispel until he reflected that he deserved such a rebuke. After putting up her tent and unrolling her blankets inside, he went over to renew acquaintance with the settler.

When he returned to camp, the fire had burned low, and as the Blairs were not in evidence he concluded they had gone to bed. He unrolled his own blankets back near the road so that in case any riders came along he would surely awaken.

He was up at dawn and had the horses and pack animals in and breakfast ready by the time Blair rolled out, lame and sore, but cheerfully grumbling.

"Say, what a morning!" ejaculated Blair as he ferociously used a towel on face and hands. "This isn't water! It's ice. Enough to make a man out of me! Have you called Sydney?"

"Reckon I'd better risk it," replied Kalispel anxiously, and making a bold front before the little tent he called out lustily: "Miss Blair!— Miss Blair!—come an' get it!" No answer. After a moment he tried again, louder: "Miss Sydney!" Receiving no reply, he shouted, "Hey, you Sydney!" And as that elicited no response, he yelled, "Hey, *Syd!*"

A moment's rather pregnant silence was finally broken by a clear, cold, wide-awake voice. "Mr. Emerson, are you calling me?"

"I reckon—I was," replied Kalispel confusedly.

"What do you want?"

"Wal, the fact is it's long past time to get up. Breakfast is waitin'—nice buckwheat cakes an' maple syrup. Here's some hot water I'll set by your tent. An' the horses are waitin'!"

"Oh, is that all?" she inquired slightingly.

"Wal, not exactly all," he drawled. "I'm shore powerful keen to see you again in that spankin' cowgirl outfit."

As he had calculated, this speech surely suppressed her. He dispatched his breakfast before Blair was half finished, and was saddling the horses when Sydney appeared. She deigned him a rather formal good morning, but to her father she was gay and voluble. Kalispel went on serenely with his work. Sydney did not come near him. She studiously

averted her face when occasion made his approach necessary, but when he was quite distant her dark glance sought him and hung upon his movements. In less than an hour he was packed and ready to go.

Blair had to mount his horse from a stone. But Sydney swung herself up, lithe and agile. Then Kalispel took advantage of the moment to approach her.

"Did you tighten your cinch?" he asked casually.

"Oh, I forgot. I'll get off an' do it."

"Didn't I tell you always to feel your cinch before climbin' on?"

"Yes, I believe you did, Mr. Emerson," she replied curtly, and the dark eyes lowered coolly upon him.

"Wal, why didn't you, then? Shore I don't care if your saddle slips an' you get a spill. But you hate so to be taken for a tenderfoot. An' some day we'll be meetin' people."

"Pray don't concern yourself."

"Will you move your leg, please, an' let me tighten this cinch?—Wal, it shore was loose. Do you know a horse is smart? He'll swell himself up when you saddle him. There, I reckon that will hold."

Kalispel transferred his hand to the pommel of her saddle and gave it a shake, after the habit of horsemen, then he let it rest there and looked up at her.

"Are you havin' a nice time?"

"Lovely, thank you," she replied, with averted face.

"Do you want our ride to last for days?"

"I'm not tired of the *ride*—as yet," she returned distantly.

"Sydney."

"Were you not in a hurry to start?" she queried icily.

"I made you angry with that fool speech. Please forgive me."

"You are quite mistaken, Mr. Emerson."

"Tell me, Sydney," he implored. "Don't you like this place? Couldn't it be made a wonderful ranch—an' a beautiful home?"

Then she turned to look down into his eyes. "It has not struck me particularly," she replied. "There have been pretty places all along the river."

"Aw!" he exclaimed in bitter disappointment, and he wheeled to his horse.

Soon Kalispel faced the winding strip of road, the shining river, the notch of the valley; and the vigilant habit of looking back reasserted itself. Two hours of leisurely travel passed. According to landmarks he had been told to look for, he was approaching the point where he soon must strike off the road on the trail to the Cove. He had spied the green-willowed mouth of a gully in the hills and felt relieved that soon he would be leaving the river, when, upon looking back a last time, he

espied three horsemen with pack animals not far behind.

Kalispel was in the lead. He reined his horse and let the string of burros pass by. Blair caught up with him and lastly the reluctant Sydney.

"Slow today, eh? Not steppin' high an' handsome like yesterday," gibed Kalispel.

"You took the lead, so I fell behind," replied the girl.

"Wal, you can go ahead now, 'cause if my eyes don't fool me I'm in for trouble," retorted Kalispel.

"Trouble? What do you mean?"

"Emerson! There are three horsemen coming. Are they following us?" ejaculated Blair anxiously.

The three riders came on at a trot. Their seat in the saddle, their garb and general appearance, proclaimed to Kalispel's experienced eye that they were Westerners. In a few moments more he recognized the leader and had no doubt as to the identity of the other two.

"Just as I figured," muttered Kalispel angrily.

"Who are they, Emerson?" asked Blair.

"Pritchard an' his pards."

"Oh!" cried Sydney.

"Blair, go on with your girl till I catch up."

"I don't want to do that, Emerson," rejoined Blair nervously "I ought to stick with you. Do you think they mean violence? Sydney, you ride on."

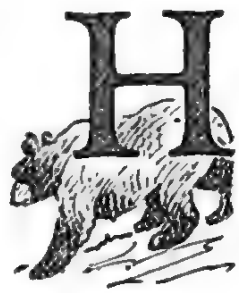
"I shall not," she declared.

"Blair, drag her horse to one side—pronto!" ordered Kalispel sharply.

He slid out of his saddle and blocked the road. The approaching trio slowed to a trot, then a walk, and finally halted in front of Kalispel. Pritchard's lean, gray visage needed no speech to confirm Kalispel's suspicion.

Chapter Four

Return to the Valley



"HOWDY, Kalispel," called the gambler coolly, making a point of deliberately lighting a cigarette. "Have you turned road agent along with your other accomplishments?"

"Now I got you placed, Pritchard," snapped Kalispel. "I set in a game with you once at Butte. An' my pardner reckoned you slick with the cards."

"Case of mistaken identity," returned the other, puffing a cloud of smoke. "Are you holdin' us up?"

"I reckon you're trailin' me."

"Wrong again. Haskell an' Selby here are goin' to Challis with me."

"You're a liar, Pritchard."

"Wal, I'm not arguin' the case

with you, Kalispel. If you'll let us pass we'll ride on, mindin' our own business."

Kalispel concluded that it would be a wise move on his part to let the trio get ahead. Pritchard manifestly would avoid a clash, but there was little doubt that he wanted to keep track of the Blairs.

"Pritchard, you an' your pards mosey along. An' don't make the mistake to come slippin' along on my back trail again," snapped Kalispel and strode aside to let the restive pack animals and saddle horses go by.

"Blair," called Pritchard as he rode on, "you'll regret exchangin' our deal for whatever this cowboy has sprung on you."

"All right, Pritchard," replied Blair. "It couldn't be much worse than yours and it's my business."

"Wal, *we* wasn't after your girl, anyway. You'll wake up some mornin' to find her gone."

Kalispel whipped out his gun and took a snap shot at the top of Pritchard's high-crowned sombrero. He knocked it off, too. The horses plunged. The man on the off side shouted, "Rustle, you damn' fool! Thet fellar is rank poison."

Pritchard did not even look back, let alone halt to get his sombrero. He spurred after his galloping comrades who already had the pack horses on the run. Kalispel flipped his gun and, sheathing it, he walked forward to pick up the gambler's hat. The bullet had cut a furrow across the crown. Returning, he hung the sombrero on the pommel of Blair's saddle.

"Just to show you I wasn't intendin' him any hurt," he said. "But I ought to have shot his leg off. Reckon I was mad enough to. Blair, they were followin' us as shore as you're born. But it hasn't struck them yet that we're turnin' off into the mountains pronto. They'll find out, though, an' if they track us again there'll be real trouble. I'm darn' sorry. For two bits I'd call the deal off with you. If I had the money I'd pay you what—"

"See here, Kalispel," interrupted Blair earnestly, "this incident didn't please me, but I'm getting hunches, as you call them. If Sydney and I *have* to get used to these nice gentle ways you Westerners have—well, I think we're lucky to be with you. That's all."

"It's pretty straight talk. But look at Sydney's face."

"A little pale around the gills," laughed Blair. "Why, boy, three days ago she would have fainted! Sydney's doing fine."

"I shore say so, too. But with me it's a question of what she thinks." Kalispel stepped close to Sydney's horse and looked up at her. "Girl, for a tenderfoot you've got nerve. I admire you heaps. But if you've got the littlest doubt of me I won't go on with this deal. I'm askin' you to be plumb hon-

est."

"Doubt of—you?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes. You heard what that hombre said. I reckon my deal with you an' your father does look kind of fishy. It's not too late to turn back. If you go on into the wilds with me you couldn't find your way back."

"I don't want to turn back. I told you I trusted you."

"Wal, I'm not shore you do. You hardly spoke to me this mornin'."

His simplicity might have been responsible for the break in her gravity. At any rate, she flushed and smiled.

"After all, I have to obey Dad," she said. "And he seems to swear by you."

"All flatterin' enough. But your dad hasn't a ghost of a show to see these golddiggin's unless you swear by me, too."

"That's asking a great deal, Mr. Kalispel."

"What do you think of me?" demanded Kalispel stubbornly.

"Well, if you compel me—I think you are a devil and a flirt."

"Aw—Miss Sydney!" burst out Kalispel in dismay.

"And very impudent—and inclined to be conceited—and an atrocious cook—and a domineering fellow—and a blood-thirsty Westerner—and—"

"Wal, the deal is off," interrupted Kalispel throwing up his hands.

"But I willingly trust my honor and my life in your hands," she concluded changing from jest to earnest. "Let us ride on, and be friends."

Kalispel found the burros resting under the cottonwoods. Little danger of them straying or traveling along without being driven! Far ahead at the bend of the road slight clouds of dust marked the progress of Pritchard and his men. They were already well out of sight. This fact, however, meant little to Kalispel, for he felt sure that they would not abandon the track of the Blairs.

Presently he came to the mouth of a gully out of which flowed a brook. An old trail seldom traveled followed the watercourse. It led up gradually, winding through groves of cottonwoods and copses of willow, to emerge into a wide valley. This was open country, the haunt of elk and deer. The trail led up the rolling slopes to a forest of pines. The Blairs kept Kalispel in sight, but when they caught up with him on top of the divide, where he decided to camp, they were pretty weary and quiet.

The night bade fair to be a cold one. Kalispel heated a stone and wrapped it in a canvas for Sydney to put at her feet. He and Blair did not make a very good night of it. Off and on he was up replenishing the fire, and welcomed the gray dawn. Sydney was

up before sunrise and declared she had slept snug and warm.

They were all that day riding down through the pines to the Cove It was a big round basin of several thousand acres, surrounded by bold bluffs and high mountains. They camped on Camus Creek, and next morning followed the rushing stream down into a rugged canyon, which augmented its characteristics until it grew to be a magnificent chasm with great colored cliffs, eddying pools and foaming rapids.

Before sunset the canyon opened out into a wider and grander canyon from which came a low sullen roar.

"Hear that?" called Kalispel turning to Sydney.

"Do you think I'm deaf? Oh, it makes my skin prickle."

"That's the roar of the Middle Fork," declared Kalispel. "An' dog-gone me! I'm shore afraid the meltin' snow has raised the river."

"Will we have to swim our horses across?"

"Gosh! I wish we could. But the danger is we'll have three or four feet of swift water slidin' over slippery rocks. An' if a hoss rolls with you—good-by!"

"Heavens! I should think you'd want to keep me with you a little while, anyway."

"Sydney, I don't savvy you," he retorted. "But I'm tellin' you I'd shore love to keep you with me always."

"Yes? And you're so wondrously brave with me. Oh, the river! Beautiful! How wide and green and swift! Dare we ever try to ford that?"

"We shore have to. But not here," replied Kalispel, his keen eyes ranging the canyon.

Camus Creek spread wide and shallow over yellow ledges to flow into the river. At this junction the Middle Fork was twice as wide as the Salmon, and presented a thrilling and formidable spectacle, roaring around a dark-walled bend to slide green and hurrying onward down under a colossal bronze-faced mountain wall into a purple gateway beyond. On the Camus Creek side sage-covered benches sloped down to banks where tall lofty pine trees bordered the river. The whole scene had a bigness and roughness that emphasized this opening into the wild Saw Tooth Range.

They forded the Camus to climb a sage bench, from which a view of the vast, smooth, grassy slopes on the left, swelling and mounting to gold-mantled peaks, capped the climax of that splendid wilderness scene.

"I'm going to camp right here," declared Sydney, and she dismounted.

"All right," said her guide smiling.

After supper, the trio sat up for an hour around the camp fire.

"You're gettin' a touch of the

real wild West here," remarked Kalispel. "But the lonesomeness an' that strange feeling for which there's no name don't grip your soul here like they will over in my valley. The voice of the stream is different. Wolves mourn on the slopes. An' the old mountain thunders."

"Thunders! How can a mountain thunder? Is it a volcano?" rejoined Sydney, greatly interested.

"I can't say how it thunders, but it does. Makes you shiver when you wake up in the middle of the night. It's the mountain on the north side of the valley. Twice as high as that an' amazin' to see. The whole front of it is a mile-high slope of many colors, bare as weathered earth can be. A terrible slant of loose dirt an' gravel an' clay. Seems like it is alive an' growls deep inside."

"Uh! Sounds kind of spooky," declared Sydney.

"Reckon you've hit it—spooky!"

Next morning Kalispel rounded up the stock in the gray of dawn and had his party on the way early. He soon called the attention of the Blairs to a tremendous slope of weathered rock on the other side of the river. It was a slide of talus so high that the ledge from which the mass of loose shale and rock had eroded could not be located from below. Deer and elk and bear trails bisected it low down. It terminated not many rods below in a rough white rapids that swept quickly into a deep eddy. If a horse was carried that far he could not scale the steep bluff of rock and would unquestionably be lost in the heavy rapids below.

They plunged on. The icy cold water splashed up in Kalispel's face. Sydney had not yet realized actual danger. Then suddenly her horse slipped. The water surged up to her saddle. She shrieked and appeared about to throw herself off.

"Stay on!" yelled Kalispel. The animal righted himself. "Pull him downstream a little."

"I thought I—was a gone gosling, then," she called, and turned a startled face toward him.

"You're doin' fine. Not much more now. We'll make it."

He kicked and spurred his own mount which was scarcely doing better than Sydney's. And they entered the bad stretch, slanted a little downstream. Kalispel urged his horse on ahead and closer to hers.

"Give me your hand," he shouted, reaching precariously for her. And he caught her hand just in the nick of time, for her horse went down and rolled. Kalispel dragged the girl free from the saddle. His own animal labored, slipped, plunged and snorted furiously. Sydney's weight in the racing current was too great. Besides, the current pulled her head under.

Kalispel dragged her up, caught her blouse, and would have succeeded in drawing her across his pommel, but his horse fell. Kalispel swung his leg and slid off. He went almost under. Then with his boots touching the bottom he drew Sydney's head out of the water, and leaning back against the current he used it to hold him up and push him along while he edged toward the shore. When he was about to be carried off his feet a boulder helped again to catch him. By accurate calculation and prodigious effort he reached the shallow water just above the rapids.

He lifted the girl in his arms, and staggering over the slippery stones he gained the bank and laid her down on a mat of pine needles. She was conscious and not in any way harmed.

Kalispel stood erect to gaze upstream to see how Blair had fared. To his relief the big horse was wading out in the shallow water. Both the other horses, unencumbered with riders, were doing likewise. The burros were already out on the bank.

"Lucky! Wal, I guess!" exclaimed Kalispel as he knelt beside the girl.

"You saved—my life," she said in wondering gratitude.

Toward the middle of the afternoon of the third day Kalispel ascertained that they were almost over the divide from the ridge of which they could look right down upon Sam's valley.

He had dreamed a good deal this last day, so that the hours had been as minutes. A thousand times he had glanced back to make sure Sydney's slender graceful form was a reality, that the pensive face with its dark, challenging eyes was there to gladden his sight. And many of those times he had been rewarded by a smile, a gleam or flash or wave of gauntleted hand, something sweet to enhance his dream. Love, fortune, happiness were within his grasp.

As he approached the last few rods of the ascent to the summit of the divide he slowed down to let Sydney catch up.

"Oh, how wild and ghastly—but beautiful!" panted Sydney as she joined him. "Kal, I shall hug you —maybe—for fetching me here—giving me this—this tremendous experience."

"Kal?" he echoed.

"Yes, Kal," she retorted archly.

"Let me tell you somethin'," he pleaded.

"Well, you've been pretty good lately for *you*," she temporized, but her eyes were eloquent and warm.

"Sydney, in a moment more we'll be lookin' down into my valley. An' it'll be the happiest moment of my life."

"Little boy, why so pale and solemn? It certainly will not be the unhappiest of mine." She

stretched a gloved hand to him. They went on.

Kalispel saw the fringed tip of the south slope rise about the divide.

"I smell smoke," said Sydney.

"So do I," replied Kalispel in surprise. "That's strange."

The horses stamped up on top. Kalispel swept his eager gaze downward to the gray valley of rocks, the silver winding stream, the grand bare slope looming sinisterly beyond. But what was it that flashed and moved? White tents! Columns of blue smoke rising! Men wading in the stream!

"My God!" burst out Kalispel, his heart contracting.

"Oh! Your valley is full of people!" cried Sydney in dismay.

Chapter Five

The Challenge

KALISPEL stared down into the valley with a terrible sickening realization that the spectacle below represented a stampede of miners. Long before Jake could have gotten to Boise and back the gold diggings had been discovered.

"Smoke! Tents! Men puttering in the brook! What does it all mean?" exclaimed Blair in amazed consternation.

Kalispel turned to his friends. "Folks, I'm so sorry I want to die," he said huskily. "Our diggin's have been discovered—an' the stampede has begun."

"Oh, Kalispel—don't look—so—so dreadful!" entreated Sydney. "We know it couldn't be your fault."

"Thunderation, boy! If what you say is true—and, by golly! it looks like it—why, there's enough gold for all," added Blair, swallowing his disappointment.

"Let's rustle down," replied Kalispel. But he was inconsolable. He divined a blow, the crushing extent of which he could not grasp. Sam would tell him.

He urged his horse down after the burros. The Blairs followed. As Kalispel descended his gaze sought to encompass all the activity in that valley. Tents glanced white and gray in the afternoon sunlight. They appeared to run in two long lines down the middle of the bench leaving a lane between. That lane was a street. Already a town had been laid out. A keener survey gathered even more dismaying facts. Camps had been located close together all the way down the stream as far as he could see. That meant claims. All available gold-bearing ground could not have been taken up yet, but no doubt the rich claims had been staked.

The descent of that pass seemed interminable to Kalispel. He never looked back at Sydney. He pushed

the string of burros at a pace that threatened slipping of their packs. At last he drove them out on the level bench not far from the stream where they began to crop the green grass.

Kalispel dismounted. Whatever he had to encounter here he wanted to face on foot. Thought of Sam's rich quartz claim somehow did not mitigate his queer misgivings. As he threw his saddle, a familiar low deep rumble brought him up with a start. The old bald-faced mountain had growled ominously.

"Hear that, Blair?" he asked.

"Hear what?"

"Oh, I did. Thunder!" cried Sydney. She was wide-eyed and agitated and gray of face from fatigue. She reached out her hands for Kalispel to lift her down, and as he leaped to her side she almost fell into his arms.

"You poor kid!" he said thickly. "Set here an' rest. Blair, you watch the burros while I go see what's what."

Kalispel strode over the rocky bench down to the stream to the nearest camp. Bed-rolls, packs, utensils and stone fireplaces, picks and shovels, piles of wood, all kinds of camp paraphernalia, appeared to line the stream. Of the two nearest miners one was bending over a rock in the stream, and the other, a tall, bearded, wet and dirty young man, evidently having espied Kalispel, advanced a little to meet him.

"Howdy, stranger. See you found a new way in," he said, genially.

"That's the way I went out two weeks or so ago," replied Kalispel curtly.

"Was you in hyar—two weeks ago?" queried the other incredulously.

"Yes. Me an' my two brothers."

"Wal, it's a pity you didn't stay on. Mebbe one of you fellars was responsible for the news of a gold strike that hit Challis about a week ago."

"I wasn't. I went out with my brother to pack in supplies. Maybe he got drunk an' gave the snap away."

"Rand Leavitt got wind of it first, an' a stampede rustled after him. Leavitt beat us all to it. Bonanza! He struck a quartz vein packed with gold. The rest of us are placer minin'. An' believe me, stranger, no kick comin'."

"Shore you know my brother, Sam Emerson?"

"Nope. Not by name, anyhow."

"Sam found that rich quartz vein, an' Jake an' I packed out a piece worth five hundred dollars."

"What? Stranger, are you drunk or crazy?"

"Neither. But I'm most damn' curious," snapped Kalispel.

"Bill, come out hyar," yelled the young miner. His call fetched the big, bearded, red-shirted man on the run. "Say, Bill, listen to this.

Hyar's a fellar who says his brother made a gold strike hyar weeks ago, an' thet he an' another brother packed out a chunk of quartz worth five hundred."

"It's true. Do you know my brother, Sam Emerson?" flashed Kalispel. "We left him here, located on the quartz vein."

"Sam Emerson? Don't know him. An' he's shore not located on the quartz vein now, for Leavitt staked thet. He got in hyar first with Selback an' outfit. You're shore haidin' fer trouble, young man, if you make thet claim to them."

Kalispel abruptly wheeled and almost ran across the bench toward the location of Sam's quartz vein. As he neared it he slowed up to catch his breath and to take the lay of the land. In the first place he had difficulty finding the outcropping ledge under the looming bare slope. It appeared to be hidden by tents and a large framework of peeled logs, which manifestly was a cabin in course of construction. Kalispel heard the blows of an ax. He passed the end of the lane between the tents. It ran west the remaining distance of the bench. He heard the crash of falling timber and the hoarse voices of men. These came from behind him, down by the stream. The tent town appeared deserted, except at this end, where he espied men actively engaged in labor around the cabin.

In another moment Kalispel stalked upon the scene of Sam's strike. He did not need to look twice at the long outcropping ledge. A tall man with a rifle across his knees sat significantly in the foreground.

"Are you Rand Leavitt?" called Kalispel in a voice that rang, as he passed the open tent to confront this guard.

The man rose quickly. He stood coatless and hatless, young, bullet-headed, swarthy-faced, and his deep-set eyes appeared to start.

"No, stranger. My name's Selback. The boss is downtown," replied the man. "An' who might you be, bustin' up hyar like a bull out of a corral?"

Kalispel was slow to answer, but swift and sure in his estimate of this guard, Selback. There was something expectant, furtive, cold, and calculating in the man's eyes, yet no sense of Kalispel's status.

"I'm Kalispel Emerson—brother of Sam. Where is Sam?"

"Are you askin' me? I don't know your brother—or you, either."

"Shore you haven't seen Sam Emerson?" rang Kalispel piercingly. The builders had ceased their tasks to come down on the ground.

"There are a lot of miners hyar whose name I never heard."

"Name or not, you shore seen Sam when you hit this valley—because he was here on this claim. He found this quartz. I was with

him when he struck it. So was Jake, my other brother."

"Man alive! You've gone gold mad." declared the guard with a gruff laugh. But there was no sincerity in word or mirth. He did not ring true.

"By Gawd!" cried Kalispel, "this has a queer look!"

"An' so have you, stranger!" retorted Selback probably misled by Kalispel's obvious puzzlement. "Just you rustle along or Leavitt will run you out of Thunder River."

"We Emersons don't run."

"Wal, walk, then, an' be quick about it," ordered the guard, making a move to swing the rifle around.

"Hold on!" cut out Kalispel.

But Selback did not heed the warning. The rifle barrel continued to swerve beneath the man's paling visage. In a flash Kalispel drew and fired. The guard's head sank, and, stumbling, he fell forward over his clattering rifle.

Rapid footfalls cracked on the rocks. Kalispel wheeled to confront a man who yelled as he cleared the tent. He ran almost into Kalispel's smoking gun.

"Line up with your gang. Pronto!" ordered Kalispel with a wave of the gun. He knew his man. This was Leavitt who lost no time lining up beside the three laborers, but he did not put up his hands.

"You see I'm unarmed," he said coolly. "What's the deal?" and he swept a glittering gray glance from Kalispel to the man on the ground and back again.

"You're Rand Leavitt," confirmed Kalispel as he instinctively recognized a shrewd, nervy, resourceful leader. Leavitt was under 40, a man of lofty stature, whose pale, cold, boldly-chiseled face denoted intelligence and force.

"Yes, I'm Leavitt. What's this holdup mean?"

"I'm no bandit, an' damn' well you know it."

"How the hell do I know who and what you are?" demanded the other. "What'd you kill Selback for—if it's not a holdup?"

"The fool tried to throw his rifle on me, after I warned him."

"Who are you?"

Kalispel did not answer. He backed against the wall of the tent. Miners, led by the couple whom he had accosted upon his arrival, were hurrying to the scene, drawn no doubt by the gunshot. Kalispel fought down his fury and despair. Whatever the justice of his claim, it would never be recognized. He was too late. He had to decide whether or not to kill this man Leavitt.

"Boss, he said his name was Kalispel Emerson," spoke up one of the laborers hurriedly. "Thet he was brother to a Sam Emerson, who he swore had located this quartz vein."

"Sam Emerson!" shouted Leav

itt, loud-voiced and protesting. "Where in the hell was he, then? I found this claim, opened up to be sure, gold shining in the sun, pick and shovel, camp duffle and stuff lying around. But no miner!"

"You lie!" hissed Kalispel.

"No I don't lie," stormed Leavitt. "There wasn't any miner here. I swear that. I could have proved it by Selback."

"You made away with my brother an' jumped his claim."

"I jumped it, yes. I had a perfect right to. But it had not been worked for days. When you accuse me of making away with your brother you're the liar--or you are out of your head."

He was steady of hand, pale-faced, but fiery-eyed, and his voice and demeanor carried conviction, if not to Kalispel, to the others present, a constantly growing crowd.

"Leavitt, I reckon I'll bore you."

"You'll murder an innocent man, then," replied Leavitt. "I'm not threatening you, as was Selback. You've no excuse to kill me, except your suspicion, which is rank injustice. And these miners will lynch you."

Kalispel had put him to a crucial test. But Leavitt had not weakened. If he was guilty, as Kalispel believed, he was too shrewd, too quick-witted and iron-nerved, to betray himself to Kalispel or lose his prestige with the crowd. Besides, there was a remote possibility that Sam had wandered out of the valley or had met some inexplicable tragic end. Kalispel felt that he was not omnipotent. In his torturing disappointment and frenzy he might have erred in judging Selback. He dared not force the issue here and lose forever any chance of reclaiming the mine. Jake would return with proofs that he had packed out the gold-veined quartz.

"Leavitt, I'll let you off because men like you hang themselves," declared Kalispel bitterly. "But I'm accusin' you before this crowd. You're crooked; you made away with my brother an' jumped his claim. I call on all here to witness my stand against you an' my oath that I'll live to prove it."

Kalispel backed away from the tent and from the gaping miners. He was keen enough to see even in that moment that sentiment of these men was divided. Turning presently, he sheathed his gun and had headed for the spot where he had left his burros, when he remembered Sydney. In that bitter moment of hopeless despair it seemed he could not face her with blood on his hands, with the fear that these miners, and surely Leavitt, would convince her that he was a murderer. As truly as that had his hasty deed made him an outcast! Plunging away in the other direction, he leaped the creek and hid far across the valley in a clump of firs, and there

lay like a deer mortally wounded and seeking to die alone.

Long after darkness fell he went back to the place where he had left the Blairs and the burros. He found only his own packs. The Blairs, with their supplies and equipment, had left. Kalispel welcomed that fact. He searched in his pack for a flask of whisky and finding it he sought to kill the cold, sick misery in his marrow and to blot out the insupportable loss of brother, fortune, love.

When Kalispel recovered consciousness, it was another day, and he believed the second or third after his arrival. The sun had blistered his face as he lay unprotected in the open. Ill, shaken, in horrible mental state, he drank the last swallow of liquor.

Then he looked about him. The packs were intact, his saddle lying on the ground, his bed unrolled. The horse and burros were gone from the grassy bench. This location was as good as any, he thought, and after a survey of the bench he concluded he could not do better. He was far back, close to the base of the divide, and over a half mile from Leavitt's camp, which stood about even with where the great bare slope began its terrifying rise to dominate the valley. The new trail coming down the stream forked into the one he had made up the divide just below where he elected to camp. Forthwith he spread his tarpaulin across a narrow space between two high boulders and moved in his supplies.

Behind him and up the gradual slope were quantities of dead and fallen lodge-pole pines. He could not eat, though his thirst was intense, and in a mood to drive himself to exhaustion, he packed down one tree after another until he had a huge pile of them.

Then, spent and wet and hot, he flung himself down and importuned heart and consciousness with hopeless query—what was it that had happened and what could he do? Footsteps roused him to sit up braced against a boulder. Blair confronted him.

"How are you, Kalispel?" he asked, not unkindly.

"Mornin', Blair—or is it afternoon? I'd be better off dead," replied Kalispel.

"Don't say that, lad. It's not like you at all. You must pull yourself together and shake the terrible passion you must have had—and the debauch afterward."

"Blair, am I still drunk, or are you speakin' kindly to me?" queried Kalispel.

"I am, son, and I mean it," went on the elder man taking a seat near Kalispel.

"Wal, if I can be grateful for anythin', I'm thanking you."

"Listen, cowboy. I've seen a good deal of life, and life anywhere, east or west, is the same when it comes to misfortune, loss, grief. If

ever a young fellow had a tough thing to face, you certainly had. But you gave in to it in Wild West fashion and it has ruined you. Leavitt stands high with these miners. They elected him judge of the camp—an office, as I understand it, to determine gold claims and all the accepted rules of mining camps. Your denouncing him apparently hurt you more than killing Selback. For as I got it, Selback was a hard, grasping man, not at all liked. Then to make the situation worse for you, our friends Pritchard, Selby, and Haskell rode in yesterday morning. They made friends at once with Leavitt. I heard them, especially Pritchard, denounce you as Kalispel Emerson, notorious gunman from Montana, a bad hombre in every way."

"Interestin'—an' about to come true, I reckon," replied Kalispel, with the ice in his soul cutting his voice. "An' I'm calculatin' that you come out to give me a hunch to leave?"

"No," declared Blair emphatically. "I might have felt that way a couple of days ago. But not now. Something has changed me. I'd stay. You see, I'm convinced of your honesty, Kalispel. I believe you and your brothers have been robbed of this claim. By heaven! I'd stay and find out."

"I'll stay, all right," returned Kalispel grimly. "Blair, set me right. How long have we been here?"

"This is the third day."

"Where did you an' Sydney go? What did you do?"

"Well, after you left us we heard the shooting and followed the crowd into camp. There we met Leavitt. He was very agreeable and helpful. Asked us to supper. Pretty much taken with Sydney, of course. He gave us a tent, sent out for our packs, made us comfortable. Yesterday I bought my gold claim from him. It's one of the best, they say. I've been panning gold. Dug two ounces of dust today before I gave out. It's the hardest work I ever undertook. But great fun. Sydney is crazy about it. Leavitt showed her how."

"Wal, that doesn't improve his chances of long life," muttered Kalispel somberly. "It's hell enough to lose her—without—"

"Kalispel," interrupted Blair hurriedly, "we were out here yesterday. Sydney wanted to see you. She seemed driven. I caught her looking out this way often. She was pretty hard hit, son. Well, we came, and found you dead drunk, lying there—not a pleasant sight. Sydney was horrified. And then disgusted. I wanted her to stay—help me do something for you. She wouldn't. I'm going to tell you what she said, because I believe it will do you good. 'Dad, I—I cared for that cowboy, Kalispel! But this isn't he. Or if it is I am disillu-

sioned. To protest love for me—then, scarcely out of my sight—give way to his terrible passion to kill—and drink. To lie here like a sodden beast. He did not love me.' "

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Kalispel, hanging his head.

"Kalispel, that's tougher than loss of your mine. I don't share Sydney's disillusion. She is young and this is her second hurt. By far the deepest, I am sure. If I know the Blairs, she won't soon get over this one. Now, boy, a last word, then I'm through this painful talk. This is a question of whether or not you are going to succumb to drink—and such abasement as that in which we found you. I like you and I think you have had a rotten deal. Besides, I know the horror of the bottle, myself."

Kalispel recalled what Sydney had betrayed to him about her father's conviviality. "Ah-huh. So that's why. Wal, red liquor never had me down till this time. Blair, you've got another reason for all this plain, kind talk."

"Yes. I've taken a sudden dislike to Leavitt."

"How come?"

"I don't know, except what revealed it to me. And that was a look I saw him give Sydney when she was unaware of it. But as I look back over my life I find that seldom or never has my distrust of a man been unjust. Or my faith wrong. It's a gift."

"Wal, I had the same hunch about Leavitt. Yet I couldn't lay a single proof of its being fair."

"Leavitt has a powerful personality," declared Blair. "He might have that two-sided nature so common to many men. If he is crooked he'll never fool me. But he could Sydney. She thinks he is handsome, well educated, fascinating, the biggest Westerner she has met yet."

"I reckon that's easy for me to see, but most damn' sickenin' to swallow."

"Leavitt is taken with her. He may get her on the rebound. It worries me. I tried to give Sydney a hint of my suspicions. She shut me up pronto."

"Wal, Blair, don't talk against the man. That'll only make Sydney contrary. *If* she really cared for me I can't conceive of her goin' to Leavitt, whether or not I'm a bloody gunman an' beast. Rebound or no rebound!"

"She did care for you. She said so, right out. And that implies more than she confessed."

"Good Lord, man! Stop torturin' me."

"I'm sorry," rejoined Blair hastily as he arose. "But she is my daughter. And she *was* your sweetheart. Hell, don't glare at me like that. I know her better than you. You can't get out of this fact: we had a common cause. I took a shine to you, Kalispel, and I felt I could lean on you."

"You can—so help me God!"

cried Kalispel fiercely.

"Atta boy! That's the talk," ejaculated Blair warmly.

"But how—Blair? How?" gasped Kalispel haggardly. "I'll be an outlaw now. Every miner's opinion, if not his hand, will be against me. Leavitt will see to that. He stole our mine. An' he's crafty as hell."

"Yes. But this camp will grow like a mushroom overnight," declared Blair earnestly. "In a month there'll be thousands of people here. They are streaming in. Twelve pack outfits yesterday. Old-timers here say Thunder Mountain will bring the biggest gold rush Idaho ever saw. Well, you lay low. Dig gold yourself. Cut the drink and don't use your gun except in self-defense. Wait for your brother Jake to come back. He may shed some light on this stampede. And all the time you will be working for proof of Leavitt's guilt. But *that* will not be your main objective."

"What will be, Blair?"

"Sydney! To win back her confidence and respect. To show her that you are a man. That no defeat can keep you from winning her and the ranch your heart was set on."

"You're draggin' my guts out of a vise," returned Kalispel. "Blair, it's not hard to see why Sydney is such a wonderful girl. You're her father. I'll play the cards as you have dealt them to me. An' win or lose, I shall owe to you an' Sydney the great lesson of my life. You go back now. I've work to do an' some mighty desperate thinkin'."

Kalispel's acts, in great contrast to his inertia for three days, attested to the spell which beset him. At least the interest taken in him by the miners along that end of the stream proclaimed he was an individual of marked interest in Thunder Mountain Camp. He bathed and scrubbed himself in the ice-cold creek; he packed water up to his camp; he shaved his bristling face; he burned his ragged clothes and donned the new outfit he had purchased; he put his camp in shipshape, and then cooked supper, all with feverish haste and in plain sight of his neighbors.

He thought that they would be vastly more astounded if they could read his mind. Leavitt was responsible for Sam's disappearance, probably his death. He would get back Sam's quartz mine from that suave and resourceful robber and kill him afterward, or he would kill him, anyhow. Proof was the imperative necessity.

Finally he grasped the wisdom of Blair's reasoning. What he had to do was to live down an undeserved reputation for reckless shooting and evil motive. How to set about that seemingly impossible task was the imperious ques-

tion. Kalispel cudgeled his brain.

Long after dark he paced to and fro under the black, sinister mountain and the stars, and long after he lay in his bed he pondered the problem. At midnight he heard the faint thunder of the mountain, and it seemed to record the passing of time, the brevity of life, the fact that nature audited her secret books—that now was the day to seize.

Morning came. Kalispel awakened to it, mindful that a resolve made in the white heat of misfired passion could be kept through the gloom and tedium of recurrent moods. He was equal to his task. He laid stone walls; he chopped wood; he washed and dried his blankets; he built a fireplace; and to his watchful neighbors he made plain that he had adopted his camp as a permanent abode.

He had supplies for a month, but not a dollar to his name. His resentment powerfully combated the idea of working a poor claim, when by rights he should have owned the best. Yet he yielded to the exigency of his plan. Once decided, he had the thought that there must be hundreds of fine claims left. But where? Anywhere in that valley of treasure, he argued.

A few minutes later he was deepening the gravelly pit of his fireplace when a gleam of yellow caught his eye. "What the hell!" he muttered, falling on his knees. The bright gleam had resulted when his spade cut into a dusty gold nugget. Incredulously he stared. Then with eager, grasping hands he clawed into a pocket of nuggets, a few large and many small, coarse-grained and dull—but gold, gold, gold.

Chapter Six

Nugget

THE TOWN on Thunder Mountain grew as if by magic. From Challis and Salmon, Boise and Twin Falls, from Washington and Montana, from the south across the black lava deserts, from the Wyoming ranges, from everywhere that men heard that siren call, enchanting and irresistible, they came deepening the trails—prospectors, engineers, promoters, miners, followed by the adventurers, the gamblers, the women with hawk eyes, the dive keepers and rum peddlers, until Thunder River hummed with a raw, bold, happy, excited, greedy throng.

Tents sprouted like white weeds and shacks and cabins followed suit. Two enterprising carpenters packed in a portable saw mill and made more money than the gold diggers. In less than six weeks after its discovery, Leavitt Mine was in operation, grinding out the

precious yellow metal. Every available claim for two miles along the creek had been staked. Up the slopes and in the gullies miners dug in the loose earth and blasted in the rock. By day and by night the long wide street of Thunder City roared. On each side of this street stores and restaurants, saloons and gambling dens, lodging-houses and dance halls, made bid for the custom of the populace, and each and every one of them was full.

The time came when the town achieved the dignity of a miners' meeting during which a judge, sheriff, and recorder were elected. The former's duty was to preside at each meeting of the gold diggers, the second was supposed to maintain law and order, and the third had the task of keeping records of claims. All claims went by numbers. Leavitt's mine was No. 1, and all the others up and down the valley were numbered accordingly.

Rand Leavitt was the judge, Hank Lowrie the sheriff, and Cliff Borden the recorder.

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One sunset hour in early summer Kalispel Emerson sat in the door of the little cabin he had erected between the boulders that had served as his shelter.

He had a double motive for occupying this favorite seat during his leisure hours—first he could watch the trails in the hope of seeing his brother Jake some day; and secondly, from this vantage point he could look down the gradually descending bench to the cabin of the Blairs, located on the bank of the stream and on the site of Blair's gold claim. Tents and shacks were scattered all along the stream and over the bench, but the cabin of the Blairs stood out conspicuously by reason of its yellow peeled logs and pretentiousness. It had a wide porch on the eastern side, where Sydney spent a good deal of her time working and resting.

Kalispel watched her at this distance, perhaps an eighth of a mile, and knew that she knew he watched her. The young miners going by her cabin always stopped to chat a moment, and Rand Leavitt often visited her there, especially on Sunday afternoons.

Two months had gone by for Kalispel on the wings of his strenuous gold digging and his passionate devotion to the task he had set himself. The former had been successful beyond even the dreams he had entertained before his loss. Every place he struck his pick yielded gold in some quantity, and he had so many little buckskin bags of dust and nuggets hidden away that he was afraid to count them. But in his serious reflection he knew beyond doubt that his dream of a ranch could be realized, and that if his star continued to shine all through

summer and fall he would be rich.

His devotion to the ideal set up by Blair had not been entirely futile, but he had found that to live down a bad name kept alive by enemies in high places was something well nigh impossible. The sole hope that now inspired Kalispel hung upon the fact that Sydney Blair watched him from afar.

Always at the back of his mind was the consciousness that he still was Kalispel Emerson and would one day stalk out to face Rand Leavitt. That seemed inevitable. Jealousy had been added to what he considered a stern passion for justice. Gossip of the gold camp had it that Leavitt would marry the girl.

Each and every honest miner in the diggings was too busy with his own labors to know what the other fellow was doing. The saloons and gambling dens were objective proof of whether a miner was rich today and poor tomorrow. As they earned prodigiously, they wasted prodigally. But this fact did not apply to Kalispel. He did not drink or gamble or spend; and therefore was considered poor, one of the many unsuccessful diggers. Moreover, his story was known, and his absurd claim and loss were an outstanding joke with those miners who did not know him.

Thunder City, however, was overrun with adventurers and miners who labored for gold only as a blind, while by stealth they stole and robbed. Kalispel had come under the cold, watchful eyes of those parasites, and many had been the time his gun hand had itched. But if they were suspicious of him, they had no ground to substantiate it, for he was just as shrewd and infinitely more watchful.

On a late afternoon Kalispel pondered a plan to further his interests; and this was to begin to hunt game with the idea of supplying meat to the miners. Deer had been run out of the valley. Good hunters were few, and most miners would not take the time to hunt. Yet they were greatly dependent upon meat, for food prices in the stores were abnormally high.

Kalispel thought his plan would serve several purposes—to give the impression that he needed money, to enable him to become acquainted with many miners and win their confidence, and to hide his secret motive to work out the truth of Leavitt's guilt. As the weeks passed Kalispel grew more sure of this. The finding and stealing of stored gold dust and robbery by masked men at night had grown increasingly until it was something to contend with.

As he revolved these thoughts the valley became steeped in a luminous golden sheen, the last reflection from the sunset flush

upon the heights. And at that moment Sydney Blair appeared upon the porch to lean against the rail and gaze out. This had become such a habit of hers that Kalispel waited for it. She wore something which shone faintly blue. He got up to pace to and fro, and at last to stand where she could not help but see him.

Kalispel had talked often with Blair, and somehow their positions had become reversed. The advice and solicitude now came from Kalispel. After all, Blair had not made as good a deal in his gold claim as he had fondly believed. His gravel bar had suddenly panned out. And digging among the rocks of his claim for nuggets or quartz had not been successful. He had begun to drink and gamble moderately, as was common among the better class of miners, yet even that little had lately made a subtle difference in him. Wherefore Kalispel, summing up, decided that it was about time for him to step out of his quiet, watchful isolation.

He walked down to the stream, to the big camp where Hadley and Jones, two progressive miners, maintained a mess for eight of their comrades. Kalispel dropped in on them at supper time. He was not exactly friendly with these men, but knew that through the weeks they had unlearned some of the lessons gossip and ill will had taught them.

"Jones, I've an idee," said Kalispel. "How are you off for meat?"

"Meat? Jehoshephat! Costs us more than ham an' bacon."

"I'm thinkin' of huntin' meat to sell. What'll you pay a pound for fresh venison an' elk? I'm a poor miner, but a good hunter. Will you pay fifty cents a pound till fall, an' more when the snow flies?"

"You bet I will. An' jump at the chance."

"Done. It'll be no trick for me. I've a horse an' burros."

"Kalispel," spoke up Hadley, the young partner of Jones, "you'd be doin' us a service. Lack of meat is the drawback in this mess. An' thet holds all over town."

"Wal, I'll see if I can drum up some more customers. An' if I can, I won't trade for any of your claims."

"Small chance of you gettin' a whack at mine," called out a miner cheerfully. "Look at this."

Kalispel stepped over to have placed in his hands a bright smooth nugget weighing in excess of three ounces. "Gosh! That's the biggest I ever saw," he exclaimed as he returned it.

"This ain't a marker to the one sold to Leavitt by a miner. Three hundred dollars he got for it. An' you can gamble thet if Leavitt paid so much it was worth a good deal more."

"Yes, an' our hard-fisted judge grabbed the Woodbury claim to-

days." interposed another miner.

"I hadn't heard," replied Kalispel quietly. "You fellows know I'm particular interested in how Judge Leavitt acquires land, gold, claims, an' quartz veins."

"Haw! Haw! Wal, this was easy. Leavitt has the decidin' of all claims, you know. An' he took over most of Woodbury's because thet hombre stepped high, wide, an' handsome when he stepped off his claim. Course the miners in on the meetin' were thick with Leavitt an' voted Woodbury out. There's some gossip floatin' about. Leavitt, Borden, Lowrie, an' a few more are playin' a high-handed game these days."

Kalispel went on down the trail, pondering what he had heard. He stopped at camps of miners he knew and got not only orders for fresh meat, but also sincere thanks for the offer.

There were several trails leading into town and the one on which he found himself happened to pass the Blair cabin. This time Kalispel did not avoid it.

The hour was almost dusk. Blair sat on his porch steps, smoking. Kalispel heard voices, and as he recognized Sydney's, he felt his breath catch in his throat.

"Howdy, Blair," drawled Kalispel as he leisurely halted. "Any dust these days?"

"Hello yourself," replied Blair. "Where you been keepin' yourself?"

"Me? Aw, I been meditatin' on a misspent life," said Kalispel coolly.

Sydney stepped from the back of the porch to the rail. She wore white. Kalispel bowed and greeted her.

"Good evening," she rejoined with perfect composure.

Kalispel's quick glance noted the sweet, troubled face, and the dark eyes that swept over him. Then he looked back at Blair, striving to hide the tumult sight of her roused in him.

"Kalispel, the only dust around this claim is what blows in from the trails," said Blair disgustedly.

"All panned out?"

"Ha! My neighbor, Dick Swan, an old miner, says the bar in front of my claim was planted."

"Dad, you should not say things you can't prove," interposed Sydney quickly. "Especially to an enemy of Rand Leavitt."

"Oh, well, what's the use?" returned Blair wearily. "I'll have to buy another claim. How you making out, Kalispel? Never saw you look so fine. Still digging up in the rocks?"

"Not much. I hate it 'most as bad as I did diggin' fence-post holes back in Wyomin'. Blair, what I dropped over to see you about is this. I'm goin' to hunt game an' sell fresh meat to the miners. Would you like some?"

"Fresh meat? Lord, yes! We've been living on canned stuff. But

ask Sydney here. She does the buying."

"How about it, Miss Blair?" inquired Kalispel easily. "Would you like a nice fat haunch of venison now an' then?"

"So you intend making honest use of your one talent?" she said in a level voice that irritated and mystified Kalispel.

"Butcherin', you mean?" rejoined Kalispel in a voice as controlled as hers. "Shore. I'm gettin' out of practice handlin' guns. An' sooner or later now I'm shore to buck into Borden or Lowrie—or Leavitt."

She wheeled away from the rail.

Blair laughed, not without a tinge of bitterness. "Sydney's testy these days, Kalispel. No wonder. But you fetch the venison."

"Thanks, Blair." Then Kalispel bent close to whisper, "If you get up against it in any way—come to see me."

Blair regarded him with haggard eyes. "Son, I'm ashamed to do it, after that spiel I gave you weeks ago."

"Hell, never mind that. It served its turn. Are things goin' bad?"

Blair whispered, after a glance back on the porch, "I've lost a good deal of money gambling."

"Aw!" Kalispel made a passionate gesture. "Pritchard?"

"Mostly to him. But others, also. I was way ahead at first. If I'd only had sense enough to quit then! Now I've got to play to get even."

"You never will, Blair. Take a hunch from me. Never with this gang. They'll fleece the skin off you."

"Fleece! Do you mean to imply the game is crooked?"

"Good heavens, man! Don't you know that?"

"No, I don't. But by heaven, I'll watch them next time."

Kalispel thought rapidly. "All right. I'll watch them with you," he replied curtly and turned to go.

"Hold on, Emerson," called Blair, rising and taking Kalispel's arm. "You won't go in these gambling halls on my account, will you?"

"I shore will. Sydney's goin' back on me is no reason for me to go back on you."

"But, son, listen," returned Blair in distress. "Sure as you do that you'll be using your gun again."

"Like as not. Will that jar you?"

"Not by a damn' sight!" retorted Blair. "I was thinking of—Never mind now. Anyway, I appreciate your friendship. And, by thunder! I think you have been unjustly maligned. They've all got you wrong, and that goes for my daughter." He squeezed Kalispel's arm and abruptly returned to the porch, turning at the steps to call back: "I'll let you know

when I'm going to buck the tiger again."

"Fine. I might set in the game myself," called Kalispel, which remark was inspired by Sydney's white form once more against the rail.

"Dad, is *he* persuading you to gamble?"

"No!" rasped Blair. "He's been trying to stop me. You don't appreciate that cowboy. You've allowed your absurd squeamishness and that blighter Leavitt—"

Kalispel passed on out of hearing. He would like to have heard Sydney's reply to that last reproach of her father's. Kalispel found his blood racing unwontedly and a choking sensation in his throat. He had been responsible for getting the Blairs into this unhappy situation. What would be the end?

He went downtown. Thunder City was having its supper hour; nevertheless, that in no wise detracted from the appearance of activity. The yellow lights of the main street flared brightly; it was crowded with moving figures; music and laughter vied with the hum of conversation. The saloons were full of drinkers, loungers, miners selling and buying claims, gamblers on the lookout for prey, adventurers of every type.

Kalispel started in to make a round of all the stores, halls, resorts, houses, on the street. In the Dead Eye Saloon he ran straight into Lowrie, but saw that individual first.

"Howdy, Sheriff," he said with careless nonchalance that had a bite in it. "Are you still trailin' Montana cowboys?"

"Howdy, Kalispel," returned the other gruffly. "No, I reckon not, so long as they keep the peace."

"Wal, I'm not drinkin' or gamblin' these days."

"What are you doin'? Look fit an' pert to me. An' prosperous, too."

"Shore. I'm all three. Just hangin' around for my brother to come. Then we'll hunt for Sam, my other brother, who made this gold strike."

"So I heard, Kalispel," rejoined the sheriff ponderingly. "You don't look loco. But thet talk shore is."

"Lowrie, you know damn' well I wouldn't make that claim if it wasn't true," snapped Kalispel coldly, and backed out into the throng on the street.

He watched gambling games in several halls. Then he went into Bull Mecklin's, reputed to be the toughest den in the gold diggings; and was there invited by gamesters to join them. Kalispel smilingly responded that he hated to win money from anyone. And as he did not play or approach the bar he attracted the attention of the proprietor, a massive-headed, thick-necked man whose name fit-

ted him. He gruffly asked Kalispel what he wanted there.

"I'm lookin' for a man," replied Kalispel significantly, and was severely let alone after that. Someone recognized him, however, and he heard the whisper: "Kalispel, Montana gunslinger!"

Finally he strolled into the most pretentious resort of the street, one that had just been erected and not yet named. It occupied the largest structure in the mining town, a barnlike frame outside and a markedly contrasting gaudy interior. Music, gay voices, shrill mirth, clink of gold and crash of glass, a shuffle of rough boots—these united in a roar. Kalispel was surprised to run into the pretty little girl he had met in the Spread Eagle at Salmon.

"Howdy, Nugget," he greeted her pleasantly. "What you doin' away from Salmon? Did you shake the Spread Eagle?"

"Say, was I drunk when I met you—somewhere?" she asked flippantly.

"You shore wasn't. Why? That's not flatterin'."

"Because I wouldn't forget a handsome gazabo like you. What's your name?"

"Kalispel Emerson." He related the incident of their meeting.

"Oh, I remember now. But you don't look the same. Except your eyes. Struck it rich, I'll bet. All spruced up, bright-eyed and pink-cheeked!—Say, boy, you'd better let me alone."

"Don't you like me, Nugget?"

"If I didn't, would I give you a hunch?"

"Let's dance. I reckon I'm rusty, but I shore used to be slick."

They joined the whirling throng on the wide dance floor, and they had not progressed far when she said, "You may be rusty, Kalispel, but you're pretty good. My God, what a relief to be free of these clodhoppers, heavy with liquor, bearded and dirty!"

"Nugget, it struck me over in Salmon that you were too nice a kid for this dance-hall life."

She looked up at him, but made no reply.

"Who fetched you over here?"

"I came with Borden's outfit."

"Borden? Oh, yes. He ran the Spread Eagle over there. Is there anyone in this deal with him?"

"Say, are you pumping me?"

"Sounds like that, I reckon. But listen, an' then tell me or not, as you like." As they danced around he briefly related the part his brothers and he had played in the discovery of gold there in the valley, about his leaving with Jake and returning alone to find Sam gone and the claim lost, his shooting of Selback and accusing of Leavitt.

"So you're that fellow!" she whispered excitedly. "You're that bad hombre, then? You look it, Kalispel. Well, go ahead and make

love to me. It will make Rand Leavitt wild."

"Ah-huh. Is he sweet on you?"

"I wouldn't call it sweet. He has reasons of his own for not being open about it. And I don't mind telling you that he's Borden's partner here, on the sly, too."

"Wal, thanks, Nugget. One more question. But don't be hurt even if you won't answer. Is this man Borden responsible for your being here?"

"No. I can't lay that to him exactly. I have to earn my living. But he's a slave driver. Ask the other girls."

"Nugget, suppose you let me be your friend."

"You mean make love to me?" The bitterness in her voice touched a deeper cord in Kalispel's kindly nature.

"I don't want to be that kind of friend, Nugget. I can be a better one. I admit, though, I'd shore have made love to you if my heart hadn't been broken. You're as pretty as the dickens. An' nice. I like you."

"Well, you're a queer duck. But I like you, too. And you're on. I won't promise, though, not to fall in love with you."

"I'll risk that, Nugget."

"You'll risk more. It's bound to look like you were drinking and making up with me. And if you get—well, too thick with me, Borden will rare. And so will Leavitt."

"I reckon. Wal, I've made the offer."

"You're a deep one. What's your game?"

"Didn't I confide in you—trust you?"

"So you did," she returned wonderingly. "I've got a hunch. Kalispel, I'm yours for jest or earnest."

"I'll stick with you all evenin'. We'll pour the drinks on the floor."

Chapter Seven

Ballots and Guns

JAKE EMERSON'S case against the Leavitt Mining Company was scheduled to be heard on the night of the very day he got back to the valley, a gaunt, haggard ghost of the man who had left there two months before in the prime of life and ambition.

The law of the mining camp was that in case of a dispute over a gold claim as to ownership, the case was to be heard before the judge in the presence of the other miners, all of whom were to listen to the testimony and then vote. Whichever claimant received the most votes got the gold claim.

Borden's dance hall, being the most commodious place in the camp for a courtroom, was selected for the trial.

Even without much time for advertising, the case attracted a

throng. Kalispel had personally notified hundreds of miners to be present. He realized that Jake and he had no chance of winning the claim. But Kalispel's purpose was to establish a contest of Leavitt's right to the property.

A thousand or more miners assembled in the street before Borden's dance hall. Less than a hundred of these were admitted, however, and that augmented the growing curiosity in the case.

Lowrie, the sheriff, and two deputies, all armed, stood conspicuously before the orchestra platform of the hall, where at a table sat the judge and his recorder.

Leavitt, pale and stern, stood up and rapped on the table.

"Gentlemen," he began in a loud voice that carried out of the open windows into the thronged street, "the case at hand is that of one Jake Emerson, claimant, and the Leavitt Mining Company, defendant. The property contested is the quartz lode, claim Number One. We will hear Emerson's argument."

When the judge sat down Jake came forward. His appearance carried conviction of two facts—first that he had endured almost mortal illness and the privation and toil of a desert wanderer; and secondly that he was a formidable person absolutely sure of the right of his cause. He halted in front of the platform, and after a long steady stare at Leavitt, he turned to face the hall.

"Men, you are all miners like myself," he began in sonorous voice. "An' if you are honest an' live by the rule 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you,' I could ask no more than to be judged by you.

"I arrived in Idaho 'most a year ago, comin' from Montana with my elder brother Sam, an' my younger brother Lee, who is standin' there. Sam an' me had been prospectin' for years an' knew the minin' game from A to Z. Our younger brother, however, was a cowboy. He took to the wild life of the range, an' as he survived one hard outfit after another he earned the name Kalispel Emerson, gunman, bad hombre, rustler. He may deserve the first, because the fact thet he is alive today proves it. But the other names are undeserved. The fact thet Sam an' I believed in the boy's honesty is responsible for our bringin' him with us to Idaho.

"We prospected the Lemhi Range before we wandered over here into the Saw Tooths. It was on the second of April, as I figgered out afterwards, thet we dropped down over the south slope into this valley. Now, men, I can prove thet we came, though not the date. As I've only just returned here today, so tuckered out thet I fell in my tracks, it stands to reason thet I couldn't have seen

any of the things I'll enumerate. Some of you miners will remember signs of an old beaver dam on the far side of the creek, where the little brook curves in. There used to be some rings of ground, earth banked up in circles. These were made by the Sheepeater Indians who camped here many years ago. There used to be a pine tree across the creek on the high ridge, an' it forked at the trunk so low down you could step up in it—"

"Thet big pine furnished lumber for my cabin," interrupted a miner. "I cut it down myself."

"Silence!" ordered Judge Leavitt, pounding the table. "And, Emerson, you confine yourself to your claim. We haven't time for all this rigmarole."

"The first night we camped here we heard the old mountain thunder," continued Jake. "An' the next day we struck gold. I took a hundred an' more pans of dust an' nuggets out of the creek. An' before sunset Sam came staggerin' into camp with a chunk of quartz showin' heavy veins of gold. He had uncovered a ledge thet carried a quartz lead.

"We made our plan. Sam was to stay here to guard our claim. Lee an' I were to go out. I was to take the quartz to prove our claim an' sell a half interest for 100,000 dollars. Lee was to pack supplies back into the valley. We left, workin' up over the pass at the east end of the valley, an' we crossed the Middle Fork, an' got to Challis. There, as we decided it took so many days to get out, an' Sam would soon be needin' supplies, Lee left Challis for Salmon, where he was to outfit an' go back over the trail we had made. I was to go to Boise an' make our deal.

"Men, I never got to Boise. I never got away from Challis. We must have been watched an' suspected. Wal, I had a few drinks thet night. But I wasn't drunk or near drunk. I was in possession of all my faculties. An' when I was slugged from behind I fell an' seen the man who hit me before he knocked me out. He was youngish, had a big round head with short hair, an' deep eyes like gimlets—"

"Gentlemen," Kalispel's voice rang out, "that description fits perfectly the man Selback I shot here the day I arrived. He was a guard at the quartz mine an' tried to throw his rifle on me."

Leavitt pounded the table furiously. "Another interruption will end this case," he shouted.

"Wal, men," resumed Jake, "when I come to I was lyin' in a shack an' damn' near dead. An old fellar named Wilson had took pity on me an' took me in. I'd been crazy for weeks. You don't have to look close to see where I was hit." Here Jake bent his head to show bare, livid scars over his

temple. "An' it was weeks more before I was strong enough to start back here. Accordin' to Wilson, the day followin' my accident Leavitt an' Selback packed in a hurry an' left for parts unknown. Some more men, known to be thick with Leavitt, left the next day, then mules loaded down with supplies an' minin' tools. Thet started the stampede. Then, the rest you know. An' as God is my witness I have told the truth!"

Emerson ended amid a breathless silence and Leavitt arose. His strong face was white with suppressed emotion which might have been anger. But to Kalispel it was that and more. Leavitt had no fear of losing the quartz mine. But he did have fear that he would lose his life. The menace of Jake Emerson could be felt by all. Moreover, Leavitt had for a second time met Kalispel's steely-cold gaze.

"Gentlemen, I represent the Leavitt Mining Co.," he began, clearing his throat. "And I am the only one living of the two men who found the open quartz claim. So far as Emerson's testimony reflects upon me, I merely deny. He did arrive in Challis. He did get drunk. He did talk and he did get into a brawl in a saloon. But I heard about that after the stampede was well on here. Selback had the hunch to come in here. I never knew where he got it. That, however, is of no importance, because when we got here we found the quartz mine open. The ground had been stripped, the lode exposed, and the gold vein was shining in the sun. But there was no miner. He had been there days before, but he was gone. Gone, gentlemen! I had a perfect right to take the claim, which I did. That's my testimony and that is all. You will please vote as you see fit."

In silence the miners dropped their votes into the hat Lowrie passed. When the contents were emptied on the table Leavitt said, "I cannot take part in the counting. Emerson, you are invited to sit with the recorder and count these votes."

Borden presently called out impressively, "Leavitt Mining Company sixty-six. Emerson twenty-two."

Kalispel riveted his gaze upon Leavitt. That individual, despite an iron nerve, showed the stress of the climax and that fury had been added to his other feelings.

"Give me those twenty-two names," he hissed, livid of face, and snatching the papers from Borden he scanned them with a mien that boded no good for these voters. Some miner yelled out the window, "Leavitt sixty-six. Emerson twenty-two."

Loud huzzahs did not drown yells of derision. The verdict was not unanimous. Leavitt could not have failed to hear that vote of

discord.

Then Jake Emerson confronted the three officers on the platform. "You win, as we knowed you'd win," he boomed in his sonorous voice. "But you haven't heard the last of this deal."

Jake Emerson located an obscure claim and went to work, a gloomy, taciturn, defeated man, brooding revenge. Kalispel took to hunting and packing elk and deer meat down off the high slopes and swales. About half his time was required to fulfill the obligations he had made. The rest he utilized working his claim which still yielded gold. He had become obsessed with the idea that somewhere inside the claim he had walled off there might be another and the largest pocket of nuggets. These nuggets he had found appeared to have been melted and therefore must have encountered volcanic action.

In midsummer the peak of the stampede was reached and Thunder City saw its heyday. Gambling dens, saloons, and dance halls reaped a rich harvest. Several shooting escapades and a fatal encounter between Lowrie and a drunken miner, with an increase of banditry, augured ill for the future of the gold diggings.

Kalispel celebrated the first of August by taking a full tin can of gold nuggets out of a hole no deeper than his waist. He did not tell Jake, much as he wanted to help that morose brother. The last thing Kalispel desired was for miners and robbers to learn he had struck gold. Besides, of late, Jake had taken to searching for Sam's body, which he claimed to have seen in a dream.

Two or three times a week Kalispel would go to the town in the evenings and develop his interesting and risky friendship with Nugget or watch Blair's gambling vicissitudes.

At length Kalispel's opportunity arrived when he found Blair sitting in a game of poker with Pritchard, Selby, and two miners he did not know. For a change Blair was winning, which fact was obvious to all from his radiance and frequent call for drinks. Pritchard was a loser, but that fact could not have been deduced from his cold pale face and impenetrable eyes. Kalispel saw how the fickle luck went against him, and as the stakes were heavy, the gambler would certainly have to resort to trickery to recoup.

Kalispel watched from a vantage point behind Pritchard and out of his sight. It appeared evident that Pritchard's ally was aware of Kalispel's presence, yet nothing came of that fact.

Finally the tide turned against Blair and he lost the pile of gold in front of him, most of which flowed to Selby. One of the miners was under the influence of drink.

The second had begun to get suspicious. Then a jack-pot was started which progressed inordinately before it was opened. Pritchard was the dealer and this was his chance. As cards were dealt Kalispel casually stepped forward. Only an eye like his could have detected duplicity on the part of the gambler. At the right instant Kalispel shoved his gun hard into the gambler's side.

"Pritchard, if you move a finger I'll bore you," he called in a voice that silenced the room.

"What the— Who—?" gasped Pritchard, his face becoming ashen in hue.

"You know who. Blair, turn his hand upside down—the left one."

Blair, staring aghast, did as he was bidden, disclosing neatly palmed in the long white hand the aces of spades and diamonds. Selby cursed under his breath

"Steady, all," warned Kalispel, "else you'll spoil the fun or scramble this cheat's gizzard. Now turn over the cards he dealt himself."

In these five cards were the two other aces.

"Only four aces!" drawled Kalispel. "Pritch, you pulled one at the wrong time."

Cursing, the young giant threw his cards in the face of the gambler. "We'll run you out of town for this."

Selby, on the opposite side of the table, broke his stiff posture to jerk suddenly. He drew, but before he could get the gun above the table Kalispel shot him in the arm. He screamed with frenzy and pain as the gun thumped to the floor. The gambling den rang with loud shouts and scraping of chairs and stamping of boots. Selby appeared to be fainting and fell over the table.

"Push him off," ordered Kalispel, who did not trust that move of Selby's.

The stalwart miner gave Selby a shove, sending him to the floor, where it was manifest that he was not shamming. The young giant's next move was to lunge across the table and knock Pitchard 10 feet out of his chair. Moreover he leaped after the prostrate gambler and, seizing him with powerful hands, he dragged him across the floor, making a furrow in the sawdust. And he threw Pritchard bodily out of the hall.

"Rustle, Pritchard, or you'll get shot," shouted the miner. He strode back to the table and shoved a hand out to Kalispel, who could not accept it, as he still had his gun extended.

"Emerson, you don't know me, but I know you," declared the miner in no uncertain voice. "My name's Jeffries. Thanks for interferin' I'm strong for you An' there are a good many more in the same boat."

"Much obliged, Kal," added Blair, pale and shaken. "I should have taken your advice."

Kalispel waved Blair out and backed away from the crowd. Haskell might still have to be reckoned with. Gaining the outside, Kalispel joined Blair and hurried away up the street.

They found Sydney on the porch in the moonlight with Leavitt. Anyone with half an eye could have seen that he had been making love to the girl. Kalispel certainly had murder in his heart.

"Leavitt, you better hurry downtown," said Blair. "Kalispel shot another man. It happened in your crooked gambling joint."

"Oh, Dad!" cried Sydney as Leavitt, leaving her abruptly, strode off the far end of the porch and went around the cabin.

Blair sat down upon the steps and wiped his wet face. Kalispel stood in the moonlight gazing up at the girl.

"You—you devil!" she cried in a low choking voice.

"Hey, do you mean me or your Dad?" drawled Kalispel.

"I mean you. And Dad is as bad—only he's a coward instead."

."Wal, if you mean me—shore it takes devils like me to save bullheaded old geezers like your father."

"Dad, what have you—done now?"

"Nothing. I was playing cards. Got way ahead. Then lost. That gambler Pritchard cheated. Kal showed him up. And then Pritchard's partner Selby pulled his gun. Kal shot him, that's all."

"Killed—him?" whispered Sydney in horror.

"For heaven's sake, no! Just shot the gun out of his hand. It'd been a damn' good thing if he had killed the blighter. Kal, come to think of it—who ought to clean up on that last deal?"

Kalispel threw up his hands as if to indicate to Sydney that her parent was hopeless.

"Daughter, it looked mighty like Leavitt was making love to you," went on Blair.

"Yes? Well, if he was, you may be sure that I sanctioned it," she retorted.

"I won't have it," stormed Blair. "Leavitt is not what he seems."

"Unfortunately, that applies to the majority of men," replied Sydney bitterly. "I have found it true of two, at least."

"Sydney Blair, I never was two-faced," exclaimed Kalispel with passion. "If I were that kind, I could tell you something about Leavitt which would make you despise him."

"Rand Leavitt is a handsome, generous, splendid man," she flashed, "and I am considering his offer of marriage."

"Wal, darlin'," drawled Kalispel, cool and hard, "consider all you like. But you won't marry him."

"Don't dare call me—that. And why have you the—the effrontery to say I won't marry him?"

"Do you see this lovely little plaything, shinin' in the moonlight?" taunted Kalispel as he flipped his gun up and caught it.

"Oh-h!—You are a monster—or you are mad."

"Shore. Good night, darlin'."

The next day was Saturday, a drowsy summer day, with a hint of blue haze in the air and the smell of fall. Kalispel happened to meet Nugget on the street. In everyday costume, free of the scant and alluring attire of the dance hall, she made a pretty, graceful figure. Kalispel did not need to be asked twice to accompany her to Reed's store. As luck would have it, Leavitt and Sydney appeared coming down the street.

"Look! There's my secret admirer with the Blair girl," said Nugget, laughing. "Kalispel, do you know her?"

"I've met her."

"She's lovely. What a damned shame if she's stuck on that hypocrite!"

"Nugget, when we pass them I dare you to speak to him."

"Never took a dare in my life. It might be a hunch to her."

Perhaps 20 paces distant, Sydney looked up to espy Kalispel and his companion. Suddenly a blazing scarlet blush suffused her face. It waved away as swiftly, leaving her pale, with great tragic eyes staring straight ahead. Because of her strange reaction, which staggered Kalispel, he could not look at Leavitt.

"Howdy, Rand," called Nugget, smiling.

Then the couples passed each other and Nugget turned to her companion. "Gosh, but he'll murder me! Did you see her blush? Why, Kalispel, you're as white as a sheet!"

"Am I? Wal, I feel yellow."

"Ashamed to be seen with me?"

"Not on your life! I was glad, an' don't forget it. Nugget, that's the girl who broke my heart."

"You don't say! The Blair girl!" she whispered excitedly. "Oh, Kalispel, she *is* lovely. You poor fellow! Now I understand you and I like you better than ever. You're true to that proud girl, though she passes you scornfully on the street. And Leavitt, the skunk, parades along with her, doing the elegant—and after dark, late at night, slips in the back door to try to make love to me. I'll be darned if I don't tell her!"

"Nugget, that'd be doin' her a good turn," replied Kalispel hopefully.

"Boy, if I know girls, she didn't burn like a house afire for nothing when she recognized you. Kalispel, I'll bet she's in love with you."

"Aw, Nugget, don't handle words so careless."

"I'll bet it," she went on vehemently. "Did she *ever* love you?"

"I reckon so. A little."

"Then it's a lot now. Nothing like jealousy to show a woman's

heart! She saw us—she thought you were sweet on the little blond dance-hall girl. She gave herself away."

"No—no! It's only worse. She'll like him all the more."

"Listen, pard," whispered the girl wickedly. "If she does I can tell her something that will kill it pronto. And if not, I can tell *you* something that will make you kill him pronto."

"Nugget!" cried Kalispel.

"That's all now. Here's the store. Don't give up, cowboy. Tell Dick I'll meet him tonight, right after supper."

Chapter Eight

"Strange Mixture"

KALISPEL was scraping and stretching an elk hide when his young friend, Dick Sloan, put in an appearance.

"Howdy, Dick. You're not pannin' gold while the sun shines."

"I don't care," replied the youth, flinging himself down.

It was then that Kalispel glanced up from his work. Dick was a fair-haired and frank-faced young fellow of 22, lately come to Thunder City, and had at once taken a liking to Kalispel. The mining camp was not the best place in the world for Dick, and this morning he looked it.

"Had a scrap with Nugget?" asked Kalispel.

"Not exactly. But she—dished me," rejoined Dick miserably.

"Dished you? Wal, the fickle little devil! She swore she liked you."

"I thought so, too."

"Did she meet you last night?"

"Yes. An' we walked across the bridge. She was different, somehow. Sort of cold an' gloomy. Wouldn't let me touch her. I smelled liquor on her. I hate thet, an' I scolded her fierce. She took it so quiet I was sorry. Then she said, 'Dick, my boss says you interfere with my business. You take my time. An' you don't drink or gamble. There's nothin' in it for the house. So I'll have to give up seeing you any more."

"Wal, I'm damned! Doesn't sound like Nugget. An' what'd you say to that, Dick?"

"I told her I'd drink an' gamble. My claim is comin' out fine, Kalispel. You can never tell about gold diggin's. My neighbor, an old miner, says I'll strike it rich. So I can afford to take Nugget's time."

"Ah-huh. An' what'd she say to that?"

"She wouldn't hear of it. First she talked sense to me, an' seein' that was no good, she pitched into me proper. Then I told her there wasn't any use—that I loved her an' wanted to marry her an' take her away from thet rotten dance hall."

"The devil you did? Gosh! Dick, you are gone. An' how'd Nugget take that?"

"Kind of shocked her," replied Sloan. "We were walkin' back an' had just got to the bridge. She stopped to lean on the rail. Burst out cryin'. I was plumb near cryin' myself—she looked so forlorn an' pretty in the moonlight. But she got over it quick an' walked on. 'Thanks, Dick, for askin' me. I'm sorry I can't.' I asked her why she couldn't an' she told me she didn't care for me. An' I said she had cared at first. She'd admitted it, an' kissed me, too. I kept naggin' her all the way back. Finally she laughed sort of mockin' an' said, 'You poor kid! Mebbe I'm in love with Cliff Borden!' Then she left me."

"I'm a son of a gun!" ejaculated Kalispel.

"Borden runs the hall where she dances, doesn't he?" went on Sloan.

"Yes. An' Rand Leavitt is his silent pardner."

"Do you think she told the truth? I can't believe it."

"No. I should smile not," declared Kalispel vehemently slamming his knife down. "Nugget is as good an' fine an' clean as the gold she's named for. Aw, I don't care if she is a dance-hall girl. That's her job, her misfortune. She dished you, Dick, because you were serious an' she wanted to save you from trouble with Borden."

"Kalispel, I shore was serious."

"Better forget her, boy, an' go back to your pannin' gold."

"But I can't forget her," Dick protested miserably. "I love her! Pard, didn't you ever feel thet way about a girl, an' couldn't forget her?"

"Yes, I did, Dick. I do!"

"Then you must understand, Kalispel. I've got to figure a way. If I go to hittin' the bottle an' buckin' the tiger she'll see there's no help for me—an' be nice."

"Dick, you'd be fool enough to do that," snapped Kalispel furiously.

"My mind is made up unless you can do somethin'," answered Sloan simply.

"All right, I'll make her see you," decided Kalispel, goaded by his conflicting emotions. "Go back to work. An' I'll fetch Nugget to the bridge tonight if I have to pack her. Right after supper."

Sloan left, and Kalispel returned to his work. But often his hand dropped listlessly and his busy mind cogitated the strangeness of love. Kalispel knew what yearning for a girl's lips meant. But Sydney surely despised him now. She could not but believe that he was in love with the dance-hall girl.

Perhaps such trend of thought had more to do with Kalispel's impotent rage than poor Sloan's predicament. At any rate, he worked

himself into one of his cool, reckless, dangerous states, and toward sunset he left his cabin and paced swiftly down the trail.

As he passed Blair's cabin Sydney came out on the porch, with a pan or dish in her hands. She wore a blue gingham apron, her sleeves were rolled to her elbows, and she looked bewitching. Kalispel was in a mood for anything. He would confront her, make her furious or sick or something, cost what it might.

Kalispel went up on the porch to Sydney's amazement. He had never done that before. Her violet eyes, suddenly dilating, appeared to search his face for signs of intoxication.

"Where's your dad?" asked Kalispel.

"I don't know. He left in a huff."

"How are things goin'?"

"They could not be worse. But as Dad is out—please—"

"Please rustle, eh? Ump-umm. I'm hopin' you'll ask me to supper."

She laughed contemptuously. "You flatter yourself, Mr. Emerson."

"Do you expect to be alone?"

"Yes. Dad will not come back. And I don't care. Oh, I hate the way things are turning out."

"Tell me, Sydney."

"No. You may be Dad's friend. He thinks so. But you are certainly not mine."

"Is Leavitt comin' over tonight?"

"I'd like to lie to you. But he is not."

"An' you'll be alone till late?"

"Yes."

"I don't like it a bit," declared Kalispel forcibly.

"*You* don't! As if it were any of your business," she returned, and again her mocking little laugh scorned him.

"Wal, take your choice," said Kalispel with a chill in his voice. "Either you let me come back here or I'll drag your father out of that gamblin' joint an' beat him so he'll be laid up for a spell."

"You cannot mean that—that last," she protested.

"I shore do."

"You would hurt Dad?"

"Hurt him? Isn't he hurtin' you more an' more? Isn't he slippin' more every day? Isn't he leavin' you alone for this slick-tongued Leavitt to—"

"Yes," she interposed hurriedly. "But that is no reason for violence. Your kindness is misplaced, Mr. Emerson. *You* are not my champion."

"Not with your consent, I shore can see. But I am, anyhow."

"You are, in—in spite of my scorn for you?"

"In spite of that. I've had a rotten deal, Sydney. From life, from luck, from this liar, Leavitt—from *you*. But deep as it all has sunk into me, I'm still a man. An' I'm goin' to raise hell around these

diggin's pretty pronto."

"I declare—you are the most amazing person. I simply cannot understand you."

"Wal, that's because I'm simple an' honest. An' you're deep an' deceitful. You're a woman. You don't play fair. I'll be goin'. Make your choice. Do I come back here or—"

"Very well, you may come. I prefer even your presence to having my poor, misguided dad beaten."

"Oh no. You can't say cuttin' things. Not at all! . . . All right, I'll come, unless I can persuade your dad to," replied Kalispel, and he leaped off the steps and strode away. As he recalled that last unfathomable gaze, his nerves seemed to quiver. When she hated him so flagrantly why did she look at him like that? Whatever complexity of emotion ruled her, the effect on Kalispel only added to his somber state.

He went into the Chinaman's little shop and passed some time over a biscuit and a cup of coffee. Then at half after six o'clock he wended his somber way toward Borden's dance hall.

The building occupied considerable space, and as it was only one story high, the dining-room, kitchen, and other rooms were on the ground floor. Kalispel presented himself at the door of the dining-room. Half a dozen young women were at supper, but Nugget was not with them.

"Evenin', girls. Where's that golden-headed Nugget?"

"She just left the table," replied one of them. "Down the hall, last room on the right. But she don't receive gentlemen in her budwar."

Kalispel thanked the girl, but made no other reply. He found the narrow, dark hall, and at length reached the end and knocked.

"Who's there?" came the answer.

"It's me, Nugget—Kalispel."

The little door swung open to let him step into a small room, well lighted and furnished.

"Howdy, cowboy," Nugget said gayly, as she closed the door. Then as she observed him more closely: "Kalispel, what's wrong? Oh, you look—"

He reached for her with powerful hand and pulled her close to peer down into the startled face.

"For two bits I'd wring your white neck."

"Why, Kalispel!—you're drunk!" she gasped. "What have I done?"

"You've played fast an' loose with my pard."

"Dick? I did not. I played square with him. Poor boy! He wanted to marry me."

"He's crazy about you."

"Dick will get over that."

"I reckon not. He loves you. Nugget, don't lie to me. You love this boy?"

"I—I like him terribly," she

sobbed. "But I don't want to—to get him into trouble with these men."

"He's ruined now. An' we've got to save him. Put some clothes on. I'm takin' you to meet him."

"Fetch him here—to my room. I'd keel over if—I went with you."

As Kalispel released the girl she sank on the bed, weak and white, her blue eyes fixed in tragic solemnity.

Kalispel ran out into the alley and had almost reached the street when he remembered that such hasty procedure was perilous for a man with enemies. Resuming his habitual vigilance, he went on across the street and down to the bridge. Dick loomed out of the darkness.

"Pard, I was afraid she wouldn't come," he said dejectedly.

"Come on, idiot. It's all right."

In a very few minutes he and Dick entered Nugget's room and closed the door. She had not moved since Kalispel's departure. But there had come a subtle change in her.

"Nugget," began Sloan huskily.

"Don't call me that. My name is Ruth," she replied as she slipped off the bed to confront him.

"All right—Ruth."

They forgot Kalispel. They stood with glances locked, tense in that uncertain moment, searching each other's souls. It was the girl who swayed. Sloan caught her to his breast.

"Oh, Dick! I do love—you for wanting to—to marry me," she whispered brokenly.

"Darlin', there's only one way to save me."

"Don't—don't make me!"

"Kiss me!" he demanded.

She flung her arms round his neck and pressed her lips to his. Kalispel saw the tears streaming from under her closed eyelids. And then she was looking up at him, as beautiful as any woman could be, transfigured.

"Borden will be wild," she whispered.

"Does he own you?"

"He thinks he does. Kalispel will have to kill him. And that—"

"Enough. Say you will leave—this place."

"Oh, if I only dared!"

"Say you *will!* Or I'll carry you out of here—this minute."

"Yes. I—I will come."

"Say you will marry me!"

"If—nothing—else will do."

"Nug—Ruth, darlin', you leave here right now. Pack your things. I'll help. You can have my tent. It's quite comfortable—board floor an' all. You can keep house for me while I dig gold for you. I'll sleep at my neighbor's. An' then the very first parson who comes will marry us. I'll make my fortune here. Then we'll go far away. You'll be my wife!"

Kalispel stepped out and softly closed the door. "By heaven, there's one good mark for Kalispel!" he whispered.

On the street he searched for Blair. Eventually Kalispel located him in the most disreputable gambling hell in the gold camp. He was already under the influence of drink and the elation of winning. Blair was a poor gambler for many reasons, but his chief fault was to lose his head when fortune smiled.

Kalispel surveyed the room and then approached the table to lean over and whisper in Blair's ear. "Come home soon as you start losin'. Hell to pay!"

"Huh? Oh yes—all right—all right," returned Blair, slowly comprehending.

Kalispel went out. "Wouldn't do for me to stay downtown tonight," he soliloquized as he made his way through the noisy throng. He was like a man that could see in the dark and on all sides at once. The atmosphere of the gold town seemed charged with fatality.

As Kalispel left town the moon came out above the bold black dome of Thunder Mountain. Its hue was orange and it had a weird, threatening aspect. The whole dark mass of the slope lay in shadow, looming as always, menacing as always, waiting. And on the moment a low hollow rumble pealed from subterranean depths.

"Thunder an' grumble, old man," muttered Kalispel grimly. "You're not foolin' me. You'll never bury me an' my gold."

When he ascended the steps of the Blair porch Sydney was not in sight. Lighting a cigarette, he paced to and fro, heavily, so she would hear his footfalls. The door was open and a faint light shone in the far room. But she did not come out. He was about to call when he heard quick steps on the ground. He turned to see Sydney appear in the moonlight, coming from the trail. His pulse leaped again. Slowly she ascended to the porch, leaned against the post, panting. He approached her.

"Where you been?" he demanded.

"I followed you," she replied, and the low, rich voice shook.

"Where?"

"Downtown. Never lost sight of you for a moment."

"Wal, I'll be dog-goned! Flatterin', Sydney—but I don't savvy."

"You may call it flattering if you like."

"Where'd you follow me?"

"To Borden's dance hall."

"An then what?"

"I followed you in."

"Sydney, what possessed you?—That joint! To *go in* it!"

"I was possessed, yes, of several things—the only one of which need concern you is that I had a determination to know."

"Ah-huh. I'm some flabbergasted. Wal?"

"I went through to the dining-room," she continued hurriedly. "Those girls! I asked where Kalispel Emerson had gone. They

looked queer. But one of them laughed and said, 'He's gone back to Nugget's room. Down the hall—last on the right!' "

"Then—what?" gasped Kalispel.

"I ran out. On the way up the street I thought I'd make a good job of it. I went into all the—the gambling places and asked for my father. But he had not been seen in any one of them tonight. Oh, I am so—so frightened."

"Wal, you needn't be—about him, anyway. I found him in Flannigan's. He'll be home pronto."

She murmured something in relief. Kalispel threw away his cigarette, in a slow, uncertain gesture which betrayed the conflict of his thoughts.

"Miss Blair, your trailin' me 'pears a powerful strange proceedin'," he drawled. "What'd you do it for?"

"I'd never tell you, but for the fact that I must clear myself of something brazen. When I met you on the street with that—that—with the girl called Nugget I was so distressed and shamed that I realized I had not utterly lost faith in you—that in my heart I still cared. Even your prompting her to speak familiarly to Rand Leavitt—even after he said she was your sweetheart—even then I still fought for you. Oh, it was hard to kill. I had to be sure, so tonight I followed you."

"So Leavitt told you Nugget was my sweetheart?"

"Yes, he did."

"An' that confirmed your suspicions?"

"It told me what a fool I was. Still I had to find out for myself."

"An' you believed I put Nugget up to speakin' intimate to Leavitt?"

"That was how he explained it—and I believed."

"Wal, for once you were right," replied Kalispel coldly. "I did put her up to it."

"How contemptible of you!" she exclaimed hotly. "He is a gentleman. He is insulted."

"Ah-huh. An' you are perfectly shore Leavitt is too much a gentleman—too far above us poor miners—to have any interest in a girl like Nugget?"

"Yes, I am. More than that—he is too fine and clean to come to *me*, if he had been with *her*—as you have done."

"An' whatever decent feelin' you ever had for me is dead an' gone?"

"Yes, thank God. You are a strange mixture of chivalry and baseness. You don't know what honor means. You have no morals. You save me from a ruffian. You make love to me and pull me out of the river when I was drowning. Then you kill an innocent man and become a drunken sot. Lastly you become transformed, apparently. You win my father. You win the miners to your

side. You take up the hardest job of all, to pack meat down to these madmen who would starve before they'd give up gold. And then *all* the time, no doubt, you were going to—to the room of this Nugget. And worst of all you come to me with her kisses on your lips—"

In her denunciation Kalispel grasped the undercurrent—the betrayal of her jealousy.

"Sydney, how do you know that Nugget is not as good as the very gold she's named for?"

Sydney gasped. "Do you imagine *I* am mad, too?" she cried incredulously.

"Couldn't a man—couldn't I go into Nugget's bedroom without having you think something wrong?"

"No!" she replied violently.

"Suppose I told you she needed a brother an' I'd tried to be one? That she'd run off from home when only a kid, an' drifted into this dance-hall business to earn a livin'? That someone had to save her from ruin—from dyin' of drink an' violence—from men like these brutal miners—an' Borden—an' *Leavitt?*"

She laughed in mocking astonishment. "I'd think you a monumental liar."

"Wal, the funny thing is—I could prove it."

"Kalispel, you lack a great deal, and one thing is brains. Can't you see how—how cheap it is to intimate that Leavitt— Oh, I wouldn't repeat it!"

"Shore I can see what I lack," he rejoined, in a storm of gathering wrath. "One thing is common sense. Another was to keep on lovin' a girl who failed in the big things—faith, love. But whatever I had for you, Sydney Blair, is as dead as whatever you had for me. An' cold as ashes!"

Her passion spent, she backed away from him to the porch rail. He loomed over her, peering down into the white face.

"All the same, I can prove my innocence," he went on. "I can prove it two ways."

"How can you?" she whispered.

"Wal, I reckon this way suits—me—best," he replied hoarsely, and seized her in powerful, relentless arms.

Sydney struggled violently, but in a moment she was in such a vice-like clasp that she was unable to move. He bent to kiss her, but she twisted her face, this way and that, so that his lips swept her cheeks, her closed eyes, her hair.

"How—dare you?" she cried, in fierce anger and dawning fright. "Let me go! You shall suffer—for this—"

Kalispel reached her lips with his, ending her outcries, her struggles. Suddenly she sank limp on his breast. And he kissed her with all the despairing passion of his innocence, with the agony of renunciation, with mad hunger for what he knew was lost to him.

When he released his hold she sank upon the bench, drooping and spent.

"There!" he said huskily. "I reckon—that's my proof. I couldn't be—villain enough to do that—if I was the—what you call me. An' I'll never forgive you, Sydney Blair."

Kalispel wrestled himself erect, and at that juncture Blair came staggering and panting up the steps.

"Wal, old-timer, I see you're drunk again," remarked Kalispel, stepping forward.

"That you—Emerson? No, I'm not drunk. Where's Syd—?"

"Here, Dad," cried the girl, rising with her hands on the rail. "Oh, you look so white!"

"Blair, where'd the blood come from?" queried Kalispel sharply, as he put his finger to a dark splotch running down Blair's face.

"I won all—their gold," panted Blair heavily. "Stacks of it! And I was hurrying home with it all—got beyond the camp—heard steps behind—men—three men—they hit me—ran off with the gold."

"Ah-huh. Wal, this crack won't kill you, but maybe it'll be a lesson. Sydney, better wash an' tie it up."

"Dad, I knew it would happen," faltered Sydney.

"Wal, I reckon some gun-play is just what I need," said Kalispel and strode off the porch.

"Come back!" called the girl.

Kalispel did not even turn his head, though her voice was like a dragging weight.

"Oh, don't go! *Kalispel!*"

He walked on, his formidable self again, out into the weird moonlight.

Chapter Nine

Baiting the Trap

SEPTEMBER came with its frosty mornings and purple-hazed afternoons. Kalispel spent less time hunting game on the heights, though meat brought almost as high a price as gold It had been inevitable that Jake would retrogress. After he lost hope of finding Sam's body or some clue of his having left the valley, Jake seemed on the verge of ruining all their chances. Kalispel finally in desperation confided in him, and that worked a great change in the despondent miner. He became amenable and willingly set his hand to the task of accumulating firewood for the winter, no small need when the snow began to fly.

Events had multiplied. Kalispel did not watch for Sydney on her porch any more, and when by accident he happened to see her, he suffered a wrenching pang. Blair had been laid up with his injury, which had induced fever, and Kal-

ispel thought that was a good thing. He sent Jake with meat and firewood to the cabin, and also had his brother do what tasks and errands Sydney would permit.

Miners with mediocre claims were working like beavers to clean up as much as possible and get out before winter locked the valley.

This had been added incentive to the small clique of bandits who were operating in the diggings. Kalispel had been unable to discover Blair's assailants, and had come to the conclusion that they were under the dominance of a clever and resourceful leader. While Kalispel was not hunting, he haunted the town by day and night, a somber, watchful man who had become marked by the populace.

One morning Kalispel had a call from a miner who brought a request for an interview from Masters, the new sheriff. Kalispel regarded that as something to expect and told the messenger he would see the sheriff.

A little later Masters approached leisurely. Kalispel had never encountered the man at close range. He was tall and lean, in his shirt sleeves, without any star on his vest, and walked with a limp. He wore a huge black sombrero that at a distance hid the upper part of his sallow face, and he packed one gun prominently where it ought to be. Kalispel's sharp eyes made sure he had another inside his vest.

"Howdy, youngster," he drawled, with the accent of a Texan. "Shore am obliged to you for seein' me."

"Howdy, yourself," replied Kalispel as he met the other's deep gray eyes. One glance at them and this man's lined, quiet face told Kalispel that he did not have to do with another Lowrie. "You sort of surprised me. A sheriff usually don't ask to call."

"Wal, I reckon he ought to, if he happens to want to see a youngster like you."

"Ah-huh. That sounds friendly, Masters."

"I'd like to be friendly with everybody heahaboots. I didn't want the job, Kalispel. But since thet rock busted my laig I can't do hard work. I got a man workin' my claim on shares. An' I let the miners elect me. There was some opposition from the big mugs, but thet didn't keep me from bein' elected."

"Good thing for Thunder City, I'd say," rejoined Kalispel thoughtfully. "Who were the big mugs?"

"Wal, who'd you say? You've been heah longer than me."

"Masters, I'm a pretty blunt-spoken fellow. Borden an' Leavitt, with their backin', run this camp. An' if they didn't want you elected I don't see how'n hell you ever got in."

"Lowrie was their man, as you know, an' after you drove him out

of town they moved to set up Haskell. Do you know him?"

Kalispel grunted an affirmative.

"Wal, my friends canvassed the diggin's an' got the jump on the opposition. So I was nominated at the meetin', an' elected, as you must have heahed if you were there."

"No, sorry to say I missed that. I'd kind of enjoyed it."

"Youngster, why'd you drive Lowrie out of camp?"

"What you want to know for, Sheriff?"

"Wal, I don't want thet against you."

Thus importuned, Kalispel told him in full the details of his entire association with Lowrie.

"An' you'd killed him if he'd hung on heah?"

"I shore would. That job of his, tryin' to arrest my friend, Dick Sloan, for no reason on earth except that Sloan dragged the girl Nugget out of Borden's dive—that soured me for good an' all on Lowrie."

"What'd you have to do with Sloan's takin' up the girl?"

"I had a lot to do with it. They love each other. She's a good kid. An' Sloan means to marry her."

"Wal, thet puts a different light on the matter. Youngster, I don't mind tellin' you I like you. I'm from Texas, an' thet oughta explain. You're in bad heah with most of the miners an' thought wal of by the rest. I'm one of the rest. You an' me ought to pull together."

"By God! Me pullin' with a sheriff. About as funny as death!"

"There are sheriffs an' sheriffs. I don't need to tell you thet Lowrie was a four-flush. He couldn't have lasted a day in Texas. Wal, outside of my likin' you, there are some good reasons why I'd hate to clash with you."

"Masters, I can name one myself," replied Kalispel heartily. "I just don't want to clash with you. Suppose you name some of your reasons."

"Wal, youngster, I'll tell you one, an' if you stand for it we'll shake on it. Then I'll tell you the others."

"Shoot, Texas!"

"I've seen twice the frontier life you have, an' most of it spent with a harder shootin' outfit than you ever met up with. When I was yore age I rode for McNelly an' his Texas Rangers. Later I trained with gun-fighters like King Fisher, Wess Hardin', an' others of thet Texas ilk. Wal, the point of all this is thet if you an' me clashed heah, I'd pretty shore beat you to a gun."

"How do you know?"

"Wal, it stands to reason. An' besides, I seen you draw on Selby."

"Masters, you can bet I'm not askin' to put it to a test. An' here's my hand on that."

"An' heah's mine, youngster," drawled the Texan with satisfac-

tion.

"All right. I'm lucky for once. Now give me another reason for not wantin' to lay me out cold."

"I don't like Leavitt."

Kalispel made one of his swift passionate gestures. "Ha! Go on. You're the most interestin' sheriff I ever met."

"Wal, another is I don't like Borden."

"Ah-huh. I reckon one more will about do me."

"I don't like the rumor thet's spreadin' heah."

"What rumor?" flashed Kalispel.

"Thet yore one of these bandits who are holdin' up the miners."

Kalispel leaped up with a curse. "Masters, this is the last straw! An' what'n hell did you tell me for—if you want me to be a law-abidin' citizen?"

"Set down again, youngster. You shore air hot-haided," replied the Texan. "Listen. I made up my mind since I been heah with you thet you have been lied aboot. I had a hunch before I came, but wasn't shore. Give me the straight of this camp gossip aboot the Emerson claim to Leavitt's property. On yore honor, youngster. This is shore a critical time in yore life. Now come clean an' straight."

Whereupon Kalispel, stirred to his depths, related in detail, holding to absolute facts, the discovery of the valley, of the placer gold, of the quartz vein, and the events following, up to Jake's return and the trial.

The Texan nodded ponderingly, pulling at his long drooping mustache. "Youngster, I believe you. Leavitt has jumped yore claim. But it's just as possible thet yore brother Sam was gone as it is thet he was heah."

"That alone has kept me from drawin' on Leavitt."

"Wal, it's aboot all cleared up in my mind. Thet's the status of one Kalispel Emerson. How'd you come to fetch Blair an' his daughter in heah? I heahed talk aboot thet too—not to yore credit."

"I happened to meet them in Salmon. Pritchard an' his outfit had got on the scent. An' Borden got after the girl. He busted into her room an' I threw him out. Wal, I got acquainted with the Blairs. They jumped at the idea of goin' with me to my gold prospect. So I fetched them—an' fell good an' deep in love with Sydney—the girl—on the way in. On gettin' here I was so wild to find a stampede on, an' Leavitt holdin' our claim, that I busted loose. Shot Selback an' got drunk. When I came to, Leavitt had played up to the Blairs an' ruined my chance of winnin' back Sydney's confidence."

"So thet's the story? Did the girl care for you?"

"Yes, she did. I reckon she might have loved me in time," replied

Kalispel. "But things have gone from bad to worse. Leavitt has it all his way now. She might be damn' fool enough to marry him —unless I—"

"You've shore split on Leavitt," interposed Masters. "Stands to yore credit thet you haven't bored him."

"I've shore wanted to."

"Wait, youngster. Heah's an' idee Suppose we work some slick deal on the town. For a spell you an' me will become open enemies, always lookin' to meet an' shoot it oot. Only we won't. I'll furnish you some bags of gold dust. An' you start roarin' around camp, pretendin' to be drunk, thet you struck a big claim. Anythin' to show the gold an' brag. Then bandits will trail you up, if they think you're drunk enough. But you hold them up. An' thet way we might round up these robbers."

"Ha! We might round up more'n you gamble on. Masters, I'm your man."

"Good! I'll slip up heah after dark tonight. Suppose you point out the Blair cabin. I'll drop in on them."

Kalispel did so, and experienced again that blade in his heart for Sydney was on the porch.

"There's Sydney now. She'll see you've been here."

"Wal, I'll tell her I was makin' a missionary call on you, but all in vain. Thet you cussed me oot, swore you'd draw on me at sight, thet you are a discouraged boy goin' to hell."

"Aw!" groaned Kalispel.

"Youngster, the way I'll say it ought to wring tears from thet girl."

"All right. An' say, Masters, while you're callin' on people don't pass up Dick Sloan an' Nugget. You'll love them, by gosh! Inquire down by the bridge, on the other side."

Next day Kalispel took Jake with him to the big high basin over the south slope and packed down the meat of two elk. A herd of several hundred had come into the basin, which evidently was their winter abode.

"Jake, I got a great idee," announced Kalispel.

"Idees are great when they are great," replied Jake.

"Soon as it gets cold enough to freeze meat hard we'll come up here an' slaughter a hundred of these elk, drag them over to the rim above the valley, an' hang them up in that heavy growth of firs. Meatmarket for the winter."

Jake did not express any rapture over this very creditable plan; however, when Kalispel confided the ruse Masters had suggested as a clever means to identify the bandits and possibly to learn something more, then Jake showed how sparks could be struck from flint.

That afternoon Kalispel strolled down to Sloan's tent. Before

he mounted the steps of the spacious, canvas-topped dwelling he heard Dick's deep, pleasant voice and Nugget's silvery laughter.

"Hey," he called, "I'm invitin' myself to supper."

"Come in, you life-savin' hombre," called Dick gladly.

"Oh, it's Kal," cried a high treble voice. And Kalispel found himself being leaped upon and kissed by what appeared to be a lovely, little, rosy-faced, golden-haired boy in blue jeans. "Where *have* you been for so long?

"Folks, I've been plottin' murder," replied Kalispel.

"We been hearin' things. I was goin' to hunt you up tonight. But thet new sheriff dropped in yesterday afternoon. He was darned nice to me an' Ruth, but he shook his buzzard head doubtful about you."

"Kal, we hated him for that," added Nugget. "Have they put him against you?"

"Say—dog-gone! You look just like peaches an' cream," rejoined Kalispel, suddenly realizing the girl's wonderful improvement. Her face had lost its pallor; the hollow cheeks had filled out; the red lips that had been bitter were now sweet; the blue eyes no longer windows of havoc. She was very happy.

"Nugget, you always was pretty, but, gosh!—Why, now you're lovely!"

"Not Nugget any more, not even to you. Ruth."

"All right, then it's Ruth. Dog-gone! If I'd had a hunch you was goin' to turn out happy an' beautiful like this, I'd shore grabbed you for myself."

"Kal!" cried the girl, startled.

"I shore love you heaps, Ruth."

"Hey, stop makin' up to my girl," ordered Sloan.

"Kalispel, how is it with you and Sydney?" she asked.

"It's not at all."

"I'm going to call on that girl some day," declared Ruth.

"I see her with Leavitt," interposed Dick gravely. "Doesn't strike me right."

"It's rotten, if you ask me," burst out Ruth. "Won't somebody tell her the truth about Rand Leavitt?"

"That's up to one of us. Nobody but you an' me an' Kal know. An' tellin' her what Leavitt really is—if she believes—will be damn' serious for us. He an' Borden have gotten thick."

"Kal, Cliff Borden has been here to see me twice, while Dick was out on his claim," said Ruth.

"Ah-huh. Wal, what of it?"

"First time he tried being persuasive. He wanted me back. Made me extravagant offers. Seemed to be struck with the change in me. Tried to make love to me! He laughed when I told him Dick and I were not living together. And he got sore when I told him I intended to marry Dick.

He stamped out, saying he'd see me soon. Day before yesterday he came again. He was different. He threatened me. I called him every bad name I ever heard and drove him out. But I am worried, Kalispel."

"What'll we do?" queried Sloan anxiously.

"I reckon you better leave it to me," replied Kalispel.

"Then I won't worry," declared Ruth. "This Thunder City is not the bloodiest camp I ever saw, by far. But it's low-down and mean. I can't cope with these men. Neither can Dick. But *you* can, Kalispel. And I, who haven't prayed since I was little, am thanking God for you. That's all. You talk with Dick while I get supper."

Kalispel went outside with Sloan, and they walked up and down.

"Ruth saw through Masters," said Sloan. "He's not as unfriendly toward you as he wants it to look."

"Dick, that Texan is a man to tie to. I should smile he is not unfriendly. But you an' Nug—Ruth keep this to yourselves. Masters wants me to make a bluff at bein' drunk, an' go round flushed with gold—which he staked me to—an' get some of these bandits to hold me up."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Sloan. "Will you risk it?"

"Shore looks good to me."

"It'll hurt you with Sydney Blair."

"I couldn't be hurt no worse with her."

"Ruth seems to think you've got a chance there. Don't ruin it by becomin' a rowdy."

"Sort of tickles me. She's goin' to be the fooledest girl some day."

"Kal, you can't let her marry that cheat of a Leavitt," declared Sloan hotly. "Even if you didn't love her! Ruth told me. An' if I was a shootin' man, believe me, I'd go after Leavitt."

"Take care you don't shoot off your chin," advised Kalispel. "Ruth knows too much an' talks too much. She's got nerve. But Borden an' Leavitt have a strangle hold on this camp. They can ruin you. *An'* if I kill them before I can show them up, two-thirds of the diggin's will rise up to hang me. An' I'll lose my chance to find out if Leavitt really made 'way with Sam."

"You bet he did," cracked out Dick. "Ruth told me. She swears it."

"Hell you say!"

"Yes, the hell I say. She knows, but she can't prove it."

"How could she know an' *not* be able to prove it?"

"She says it's a little of what she heard an' a lot that she felt."

"Wal, that wouldn't go far in a court, unless what she heard was important."

"We take her word. I'll bet

Masters would, too. But nobody else would take stock in what a dance-hall girl swore to. That's the weakness of the case."

Kalispel admitted it. Leavitt had Boise mining men interested in the quartz lode. To get possession of the property by force seemed impossible, and any other way began to loom as a forlorn hope. Kalispel divined that the day was not far distant when he would abandon that hope. In this event all he wanted was a short meeting with Rand Leavitt.

That night Kalispel went on his pretended spree. He staggered into every saloon on the street, smelling of rum, inviting all idlers to drink with him, yet contriving not to drink himself. Everywhere he displayed a big bag of gold nuggets. The invitations to gamble were as numerous as the gamblers.

"Ump-umm. No time—gamble," he would reply. "Wanta drink—an' shoot thish town up. I'm bad hombre—I am—an' lookin' fer trouble. Gonna shoot daylights outa dansh-shall fellar—an' lousy claim-jumper."

He created a sensation everywhere. Word flew from lip to lip: "Kalispel Emerson on the rampage!" The roar subsided when he entered, pale-faced, maudlin, staggering, with a bag of gold in his left hand; the chairs scraped or fell over or the players left them; the crowded bars turned a sea of faces; the throng split to let him through and mixed together again to follow him out into the street. He broke up the dance at Borden's hall and shot out the lights. Lastly he weaved from side to side up the center of the street, singing a range drinking song, and thus on outside of town. But that night the ruse did not work, and he arrived at his cabin tired out and disgusted.

Next morning he saw the sunrise from the rim of the south slope.

Kalispel's bad moods might start out with him, or like giants stalk behind him on the trail, but they never lasted. When, on this day, he gained real solitude, his morbid thoughts began, one by one, to drop away like scales. The labor of climbing high, the smell of pine and fir, the intimacy of the old gray cliffs, the melancholy twittering of birds on their way south, and the low song of insects bewailing the death of summer, the color and wildness of the ledges, the freedom of the heights, the wild life that ranged before his gaze—these and all the phases of nature, increasingly more satisfying as the days multiplied, began to soften defeat and heartbreak, and the evil of the sordid, greedy camp below.

Kalispel led his pack burros back to the edge of the basin where he hunted, and tying them to saplings, he began his stalk.

Chapter Ten

Murder

LATE that night in the fitful flare of Kalispel's camp fire, Blair appeared like a man who was afraid of his shadow. He was sober, but apparently laboring under great stress. "Leavitt and Sydney —have been haranguing me. Made my life—hell—lately. I didn't want them to see me coming here—so waited till dark."

"It's long after dark, old scout," replied Kalispel, scrutinizing the other's haggard face. "What's on your chest?"

"I'm a ruined man."

"Wal, that's nothin'. I've been ruined a lot of times."

"You're young and you don't care a damn for anything or anybody."

"Shore. But you can do like me. Get up an' go on!"

"I can't. This gold digging was all right for me when I had some results and didn't work too hard. But that's finished. The gambling is worse. I'm a fool. I had twenty thousand dollars when we got here. All gone!"

"Whew! twenty thousand? My gosh, man, you have drank an' gambled all that away?"

"No, not by any means. I bought two claims, you know. Then I had ten thousand hidden in the cabin. The rest went for our living, and my—"

"Wal, that's different," interrupted Kalispel. "You're not ruined if you've got ten thousand."

"I haven't got it. Stolen out of the cabin! It was in a big leather wallet, hidden in a chink between two logs, high up where I thought nobody could locate it. But somebody did. Sydney left the cabin open. She went downtown with Leavitt. That was the night you got drunk and went raving around town."

"Yeah, I did sort of slop over," drawled Kalispel. "If Sydney went downtown I reckon she saw me."

"Did she? Well, I guess she did. She quarreled with Leavitt, and later with me.

"She was in a passion. It struck me she was madder about your break than she was at the loss of our money."

"Humph!" ejaculated Kalispel, in a quandary. "I reckon you're barkin' up the wrong tree, Blair."

"I always have done that," returned the older man plaintively. "But I still have ears. I can hear. And I heard Sydney lacing it into Leavitt about *you*. Evidently he had been blackguarding you, and she, like a woman, roasted him for it when it was true. Later she did the same to me. I haven't any tact. I'm testy, anyway, these days. And when I said, 'If you cared so much about Kal, why in hell did you let him go to the dogs. I thought

she was going to tear my hair out."

"Wal, I'm a son-of-a-gun!" exclaimed Kalispel.

"Sydney ended it by swearing she despised you—that if I ever spoke to you again she'd leave me—and that for her you were dead."

Kalispel sat mute.

"But to come back to the money," went on Blair. "I didn't dare mention to Sydney that I wouldn't put it beyond Leavitt to steal. I haven't a leg to stand on, Kal. And I ought to be ashamed. All the same, I'll be damned if I don't believe he might have stolen it. No one else has been there—at least indoors."

"Wal, there are two more men in camp who'd back you up. Jake an' me," declared Kalispel. "But that's far-fetched, Blair."

"Maybe. I'm finding out a good deal. Leavitt has only a quarter share in that quartz mine. He had to give the other shares to mining men of Boise to back the deal. He told Sydney that they had taken out about three hundred thousand dollars. Also that lately the vein panned out on solid granite. The engineer who was here claimed they'd strike the quartz again, but it would be necessary to pack in and install a hundred-ton stamp mill. At enormous expense, Leavitt doesn't believe the mine is worth it. And he confided further to Sydney that he'd be leaving Thunder City by spring. Wants her to go out with him and marry him. All of which he asked her to keep strictly secret."

"Queer deal from the start," muttered Kalispel. "But Leavitt is a deep lyin' hombre."

"Why would he want it kept secret? That about the quartz vein failing in solid granite is bound to leak out."

"I reckon these minin' men are all close-mouthed. Maybe Leavitt has other irons in the fire here. For instance, he's a pardner of Borden in that saloon an' dance hall."

"Well, it's a sickening mess. I have failed, my girl is drifting, and you have gone back to your old habits. You'll break out presently and get shot or hanged. Then we won't have a friend."

"Wal, you could count on Leavitt," replied Kalispel with a sarcasm he was far from feeling.

"I've fallen low enough without accepting charity from him."

"Hell, man! He sold you worthless claims—planted claims—at enormous prices. Borrow from him."

"You said that about planted claims before. You mean he had gold dust stuffed in the sand and gravel so that it'd look like a natural deposit?"

"Shore, that trick is as old as minin' gold."

"There have been several other claims which panned out the same way, and every single one of them

was bought by men who didn't get here early in the stampede."

"More damnin' evidence."

"Then—there's no redress," said Blair with finality.

"Nothin' but red blood," replied Kalispel.

Blair got up to slink away, bent and plodding, like a man overburdened.

"Tell Sydney I'll be droppin' in on you pronto," called Kalispel. "An don't *you* be surprised at anythin'."

Blair went on mumbling to himself. Then Kalispel set about making himself as dishevelled and drunken-looking as was possible, in accordance with the part he had to act. He meant to make the best of it and thought that if he did get to see Sydney, it would be an adventure.

The porch of the Blair cabin was dark and the door was closed. Kalispel espied a crack of light and stumbled up the steps, puffing like a porpoise, and staggered to the door.

"Ushed be—door round someplace," he grumbled. After fumbling around he knocked loudly. The door opened swiftly enough to make him suspicious that Sydney, who opened it, had heard him before he knocked. She looked like an outraged queen, yet intensely curious. Kalispel lunged in, pushing her aside. The room was bright with lamp and fire, very colorful and cosy. Blair sat staring in astonishment.

"Howdee, Blair," said Kalispel, wiping his nose sheepishly. "Where is that lovely dotter of yours?"

"She let you in," replied Blair, and suddenly he averted his face to hide a smile.

"Ish that you, Syd?" asked Kalispel turning to the girl.

"Get out of here," she ordered, anger, disgust, and sorrow expressive in face and voice.

"Jush wanta tell you—ain't gonna drink no more—turnin' over new leaf—an' I'm comin' back to you."

"You are not."

"Aw, Syd, be reasonable," he begged, reaching for her with unsteady hands. She avoided him. "You ushed to be—turrible fond of me."

"Yes, to my shame and regret," she retorted hotly. Yet he fascinated her.

Suddenly Kalispel ventured a dramatic transformation. "Say, girl—this talk buzzin' round. You ain't lettin' this fellar Leavitt make up to you?"

"That's none of your business, Mr. Emerson. But I am."

"Should think you'd be ashamed."

"Well, I'm not. Why should I be? Rand Leavitt is—is all that you are not."

"By gosh, lady, you shore said it! Haw! Haw! Bad hombre as I am I wouldn't be low-down

enough to make love to you—an' then go straight to them dance-hall girls," exclaimed Kalispel.

"Oh, you liar! Get out! I will not listen to your insulting him in my own home."

"I'm gonna *kill* him!" hissed Kalispel.

"Maybe you are," she returned bravely, though she shrank visibly. "I am not so scared about that as I was. You're pretty much of a blowhard. And if what I hear is true, you will be arrested before you can do this mischief."

That stopped Kalispel. There was no sense in acting with this girl. You had to stand for what you actually were or be made out a fool. He wiped his wet face and brushed up his dishevelled hair, and swiftly dropping his role, he transfixed her with a gaze no drunken man could have managed.

"Miss Blair," he said in a voice like a bell, making her a mocking bow. "I am shore indebted to a little trick to find out just what you think of me. An' I'll say that I'm as disappointed in you as you are in me. I thought you a wonderful fine girl, too wise to be made a fool of, too loyal to go back on your friends. But you're just ordinary, after all. You've been easy for this lyin' villain, Leavitt. It'd serve you right if I let him go on an' ruin you as he has ruined your father. Maybe I will. An' as for insult, you can take *this* for yours to me."

And he slapped her face, not brutally, nor yet gently. She gasped and swayed back, her hand going to the red mark across cheek and mouth, and her eyes widening with horror, fury, and utter incredulous amazement.

Kalispel stepped out, slamming the door behind him. In all his life he had never known such passion as had just waved over him.

"Oh, Daddy—he—he wasn't drunk!" Sydney cried wildly, inside the cabin. "He wasn't *drunk!* Yet he struck me. I don't understand. There's something—wrong—terribly wrong! Oh, his eyes! He will kill Rand! He will. I saw that. What can I do?"

"Daughter, it strikes me you can't do anything," Kalispel heard Blair answer. "Least of all save that rotten Leavitt's life. Not from this Kalispel boy! And I wouldn't raise my finger to avert it."

"Oh, it'd be awful—if they hanged him!"

Kalispel passed down the steps out of hearing. What he had heard blew out his passion like a storm wind does a candle, and he went out into the open.

For a long time he sat on a log in the darkness. Then he returned to his cabin and changed his boots for crude moccasins he had recently made. Passing by Blair's cabin, he listened under the lighted windows. Someone was moving about within, but evidently the Blairs did not have company.

Kalispel decided upon a venture he had long cogitated—and that was to track Leavitt relentlessly, like an Indian bent upon revenge. He knew that there was always a guard on duty at the quartz mine, the shafted opening of which was only a step from Leavitt's cabin If occasion required, Kalispel could overpower the guard. but what he wanted was to act with caution until he would be rewarded by something to substantiate his suspicion that Leavitt was leaning toward a career like Henry Plummer, who, most notorious of all prominent officials of a frontier mining town, had all the time been the leader of the most desperate and murderous band ever hanged on the frontier.

Kalispel made his way across the boulder-strewn bench to the edge of the bare slope, and step by step he proceeded until stopped by a high barbed-wire fence which surrounded Leavitt's claim. Following the fence, he rounded the corner. Huge piles of boulders, cleared off the claim, afforded ample cover for him to approach the cabin. At length he passed the claim fence and faced the open. Leavitt's big cabin sat apart with bright flares streaming from the door and window. Slow footfalls sounded on the porch; voices came from inside; the black shadow of a man barred the light.

Kalispel sank behind a boulder to listen and watch and decide upon further action. He could not distinguish what was being said inside that cabin. It would be necessary for him to get a position under the window. That seemed impossible in view of the fact that the guard patrolled the porch and the space in front of the claim. Kalispel watched for a long time, during which the guard left the porch twice to pass between Kalispel and the fence.

Waiting until the guard passed a third time, Kalispel crawled from his covert and wormed his way across the open ground. He had just crossed the space when by one of the chances that rule events the guard turned back off the porch. Kalispel sank, silently flattening himself to the earth. The guard passed within 10 feet of where Kalispel lay and went on toward the end of his beat. Kalispel glided to the cabin and a point under the lighted window. When he got beyond the outflaring ray of lamplight he cautiously rose to his feet.

"Mac," came in Leavitt's voice, "tell Leslie to keep off of the porch."

Heavy footsteps followed this order.

"Cliff, I don't like this man Masters. To hell with Texans, anyway," went on Leavitt, pounding a table with his fist.

Kalispel quivered. Borden and Leavitt together there in the cab-

in!

"Well, he's after that damned meddling gun-slinger," replied Borden.

"Bah! How much is he after him?" retorted Leavitt. "The infernal cowboy has got us all buffaloed. It was he who took Nugget away. I'll bet as much for his own pleasure as for that fellow, Sloan. Have you seen Nugget again?"

"Yes. No good. She's brimstone and steel, that kid. Once off the drink, she can't be handled."

"Well, let her go," returned Leavitt roughly. "I'm through. Sydney has said a couple of queer things to me lately. She's heard gossip. Or maybe Emerson put something in Blair's head. He's got leery of me."

"All the better. You can't be saddled with him, girl or no girl. I'll gamble there's no more to be squeezed from him."

"We'd better let Nugget alone," rejoined Leavitt evasively. "I'm through. And if you know when you're well off, you'll do the same."

"Hell! Rand, the fact is I didn't know I was stuck on the girl. Maybe I wasn't till she left. But you should see her now. She's got your proud, dark-eyed beauty beaten to a frazzle. And I'm going to get her back to the place."

"Look here. It's not good business. I'm reminding you that I have a half share in your place. No kick coming as to returns. It's a gold mine. But don't press this case of yours over Nugget."

"I'll have her back," clipped out Borden.

"How?"

"I've thought of a way, all right."

"Risky. You've not a safe man to deal with, Borden. You might do away with Emerson without risk. But if you did the same by Sloan, it'd stir up the miners. They've stood for the holdups pretty reasonable. Plenty of gold dust. If you go to killing some of them, though, you look out."

"I won't take your advice," replied Borden sullenly.

"Why not? I *tell* you, damn your stupidity, that Emerson will kill you. Lowrie told me you had clashed with Emerson before because of Sydney. Why won't you listen to me?"

"You run your own affairs. I'll run mine."

"I see. We're not making as good a team as I thought we'd make."

"Leavitt, excuse me for being blunt," returned the other hotly. "But you seem to be whole hog or none. I had a hunch you were head of this holdup gang and—"

"Don't talk so loud, you fool!" rejoined Leavitt in a voice like the clink of cold metal. "You've hinted that before. Don't do it again."

"Well, here are the cards on the table," returned Borden insolently. "You are pretty smart, but you don't know it all. Your right-hand man, Charlie March, loosens up a bit in his cups. And he told Sadie and Sadie told me."

There followed a pregnant silence. Kalispel heard the soft tapping of pencil or some hard instrument on the table inside

"What?" asked Leavitt coolly.

"That your quartz vein was done. That you're sore because your partners got most of the gold dug. That talk of a hundred-ton stamp mill was a bluff. That you meant to clean up here by spring and then leave."

"All of which is true, Borden. This place will soon be played out. I got a—rather unsafe start for me. I'm sorry, because there's plenty of placer gold yet, and no doubt more quartz veins to be opened."

"Thanks," returned Borden gruffly.

At this juncture Kalispel heard men talking in front. They were walking up and down, directly across the only avenue by which he could escape. The cabin stood against the slope which could not be scaled.

"Borden, you're skating on thinner ice here than any man in the camp. Once more I *tell* you. Don't trust this Masters. Lay off Nugget. Keep out of Emerson's way."

"Suppose I won't take your advice?"

"Then we split. Amicably, of course. You can pay me what you think square for my interest in your place."

"All right, I'll think it over," concluded Borden, and stamped out. Kalispel heard his heavy boots crunching the gravel. Then came the scrape of Leavitt's chair and the measured tread of a man locked in thought. This continued until the cabin was entered by the man who had gone out to see the guard.

"Mac, shut the door," ordered Leavitt suddenly.

"Boss, what's up?" inquired the other complying with the order.

"March has been gabbing."

"You don't—say!" gasped Mac in a sibilant whisper.

"I always distrusted Charlie where a combination of women and liquor could get to him. We can't risk any more, Mac. Where will he be now?"

"With the girl Sadie, shore."

"All right. You and Struthers slip round to Borden's by the back way. Hide by that side door. It's dark there, you know. When he comes out, let him have it. And rob him! Savvy? Everybody knows he's my right-hand man."

"I savvy, boss. Not a bad idee," replied the other in a hoarse whisper, and he left the room and cabin with no uncertain steps.

Kalispel leaned sweating and shaking against the cabin wall.

He had the thing in a nutshell. How raw and simple, after all! He battled again with a temptation to hold up Leavitt and take him down to Masters. Suddenly it occurred to him to intercept Leavitt's men before they accomplished their work, and better, to get to Charlie March first. If he could convince March of this plot against him, he might make an ally out of that worthy. Kalispel decided on the attempt.

When it came to getting away unseen, however, Kalispel encountered difficulty. The guard hung close to the cabin. And another, who came to relieve him, offered no opportunity until Leavitt called the man in. Quickly Kalispel glided away in the darkness.

Once on the noisy, glaring street he strode rapidly downtown. An unusually large crowd stood in front of Borden's resort. Kalispel had not before beheld so many persons grouped in that attitude of singular suggestiveness, but he had seen many a knot of somber men, heads together, talking low, with that unmistakable air of fatality about them.

"What's happened?" queried Kalispel of the nearest men.

"Some fellar shot, comin' out of the bird cage," was the reply.

"Killed?"

"Yes, an' robbed, too."

"Who was he?"

"Nobody seems to know."

Kalispel mingled with the crowd and was not long in discerning the quality of its temper.

"Men, thet's carryin' this hold-up game too far," said one.

"First shootin', an' ought to be the last," replied another.

"Hell, if this keeps on it won't be safe to come out after dark."

"Wal, what we want hyar is a vigilante organization."

Masters came out of the hall with several men.

"Sheriff, did you identify him?" asked a bystander.

"Yes. It's Charlie March, foreman at Leavitt's mine."

"March! That'll shore make Leavitt hoppin' mad."

"Reckon he didn' know thet March was hell on likker an' wimmen."

Masters, moving into the less crowded street, encountered Kalispel. "Howdy thar, cowboy," he called in a voice markedly louder than his usual drawl. "Was you heahaboots when this shootin' came off?"

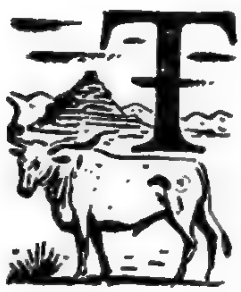
"Just got here, Sheriff," replied Kalispel not amiably. He did not relish attention being focused upon him at that moment.

"I heahed you was always around where there was dancin' an' fightin'—an' holdups."

Kalispel was dumbfounded. "Wal, Sheriff," he retorted bitingly, "When I am around such—usually the right man gets shot."

Chapter Eleven

Leavitt's Cache



THE crisp cool weather gave place to a warm threatening spell that according to Jake would end sooner or later in the equinoctial storms. The wholesale killing of elk for meat storage was not advisable until frost came again.

Discouraged and defeated gold seekers took advantage of the mild days to leave the valley. The winding trail was now seldom vacant of pack animals and plodding men leaving without regret the El Dorado that had not glittered for them.

Kalispel noted, however, that none of the parasites left the valley. They would stay on, intensifying their leechlike endeavors upon the diminishing throng of miners. The next phase of Thunder City, therefore, could be expected to increase the activity of those who preyed upon the diggers.

Blair made it known to Kalispel that he had tried in vain to sell his claims back to Leavitt for merely enough to hire some freighter to pack him and Sydney out of the valley.

Kalispel made no comment.

"How are you fixed for supplies?" asked Blair as if forced.

"Can let you have flour, bacon, coffee, salt, some tinned fruit, but no sugar," replied Kalispel.

"Help me pack it down to my cabin. There'll be hell," went on Blair desperately. "I swore I'd starve before I'd eat any food that came through Leavitt. And Sydnew swears she'll leave me if I get any from you."

"Ah-huh. Where would she go?"

"Once she said she'd go to Leavitt. And again that she'd become a dance-hall girl."

"Bluff. Let's call her."

Wherewith they packed the supplies down to Blair's cabin. Sydney stood silent upon the porch watching them carry in the goods. She had grown thinner, her bloom had faded, and her large eyes were all the more wonderful for their tragic pride and scorn. Kalispel felt his heart soften. If she had really loved him, only a little, he could have forgiven her incomprehensible affair with Leavitt.

"Sydney, do you want to leave here?" he asked abruptly, as always carried away by her presence.

"Yes."

"I'll get some money somewhere."

"Somewhere!" she echoed scornfully."

"By gamblin' or borrowin' from Nugget or even holdin' up a miner," replied Kalispel, driven to strengthen her miserable estimate of him.

She gazed at him in horror and

wonder. Her woman's intuition detected some insincerity about him, something baffling that repelled as well as fascinated her.

"Once more, Sydney, an' the last time, for your father's sake, for yours—for your honor an' more than life—give up this man Leavitt."

"Why?"

"He's not what he seems."

"All men are liars."

"Ump-umm. Not me, Sydney Blair. I might lie to tease you or keep you from bein' hurt, but I wouldn't tell you a black lie to save my life."

"You lied about your little Nugget," she returned in a hot passion that would have betrayed jealousy but for his hopelessness. "You rescued her for your friend—from the vile dance hall. How noble! How chivalrous! Yes. But to share her with—"

"Never mind more of that. One word about Leavitt. Yes or no."

"No," she cried violently. "And if you come here tonight a little before eight—and conceal yourself there—you shall see him kiss me."

"Sydney!"

"I have not yet. But tonight I shall. That will end this farce. Brutal as you are, you could hardly murder him in my arms."

"I'll come—I'll be here," whispered Kalispel, spent and shaking. "An' if you let that villain have you—God help him—an' me!"

Kalispel long before the appointed hour, hid in the dark shadow of the large rock upon which one end of the Blair porch rested. He leaned there, sick, desperate.

Blair left the cabin early, grumbling as usual, and disappeared in the blackness. Clouds obscured the stars and the air was warm. Nighthawks swept overhead uttering melancholy cries; a wolf mourned from the heights; and the stream murmured on as if weary of its endless task.

After a time, Kalispel's sensitive ear caught the beat of rapid footsteps coming along the trail. They sounded like the steps of a formidable man who would be hard to turn aside. And they came directly toward Blair's cabin.

Kalispel leaned out to see a tall, dark form leap up on the porch. Leavitt!

"Hello, Sydney," called Leavitt in a low, eager voice as he knocked at the open door.

"Rand! There you are. Late again!" replied Sydney. "It is after eight."

Kalispel gaped in amazement. Sydney's reply did not seem natural. But, he corrected, what did he know about the many sides of a woman?

"I'm—sorry," replied Leavitt, breathing fast. "I took time while my man was away at supper—to hide some more gold. You see, I'm growing stingy. I want a lot of

gold for you to help me spend."

Sydney laughed—a curious little laugh without mirth. "Don't come in. It's cool outside— Now, Rand! I get so tired resisting your advances."

"Stop then! You'll never have any peace until you do," he responded with the ardor of a lover.

Kalispel saw the upper part of their forms silhouetted black against the frame of yellow light of the doorway. Leavitt had his arm around her waist. They walked out of the flare and presently appeared at the porch rail, side by side, their faces indistinct in the gloom.

"You are always talking about gold," she said. "If I were ever to —to care for you, I'd be jealous of your gold."

"Ever! Don't you care now?"

"I'm afraid not—in the way you want. Speaking of gold, Father said you offered to lend him some today."

"Yes. He refused it. Your dad has changed toward me in some unaccountable way. I'll have to buy back his claims to help him. And I'll be glad to do it. I always regretted these claims failed to pan out. But they looked as good as any."

"Thank you, Rand," she murmured gratefully. "Where do you hide your gold? Aren't you afraid it will be stolen?"

"I hide mine under the floor of my cabin. A section of log slips out—it fits so perfectly that it could never be detected. Underneath there's a space hollowed out in the base log. There! I have trusted *you*. The only person I would trust."

"Take care I don't steal your riches, sir," she retorted. Then in a grave voice: "Father thought he had a safe hiding place for his money. But he would soon have gambled it away."

"Emerson stole that money," declared Leavitt.

"So you have said before. I should imagine it would be embarrassing to tell *him* Why do you think he took it?"

"Well, he has been seen with considerable gold lately. It is known he seldom pans for gold. And it is hinted that he is one of the bandits who are taking toll of us miners, more and more."

"Better safeguard your own, then."

"I seldom leave my cabin, except to come here. Then I have guards who patrol my claim. I'm more afraid of a landslide than robbery."

"Rand, are you not afraid of Kalispel Emerson?" she asked.

"No. But why should I risk gunplay with a notorious cowboy?" he replied somewhat coldly "I'm surprised that you ask."

"Father said you and Borden were deathly afraid of the fellow."

"That is not true, of me, at least. He has threatened me, I

know. But there's nothing for me to gain by fighting Emerson, and everything to lose—*you!*"

"But how about your Western code of honor? As I understood it, when a man has an enemy and accuses him of something—and dares him to come out—if he fails to do so he is branded a coward."

"That is true. Still, it can scarcely apply in my case. I am a man of affairs, with a future. Kalispel Emerson is a wild cowpuncher, a drinking gamester, a bully, proud of his gun record—and if he doesn't get shot he'll hang."

"I understand. But still there it is—the man-to-man thing."

"Sydney, you could not possibly want me to meet this gunman in a street fight?" demanded Leavitt.

"No. I hate fighting. This blood-letting sickens me. A little more will send me back home. Still, I'm a woman—and curious."

"Indeed you are a woman—and glorious," he replied passionately, throwing his arms around her. "Sydney, I'm hungry for you. Don't you love me?"

"I don't think—I do," she returned faintly. "I'm afraid you fascinate me. But you should wait— Oh!"

He had kissed her. Kalispel's ears registered the soft contact of the man's lips. Then for an instant Sydney's pale face gleamed against his dark shoulder, and she drew away.

Kalispel staggered like a drunken man from his covert and made his way round the corner of the cabin to the other side, where he headed for the open bench.

"Take your medicine, Kal," he whispered huskily. "It's over—an' not so tough! God, these women! They're like snakes. Yet in her heart she despises him."

Suddenly into the hot hate and agony of the moment there flashed an idea that effected almost instant transformation of his feelings. He remembered Sydney's strange luring from Leavitt of the secret of the hiding place of his gold. What had been Sydney's motive—knowing Kalispel heard there in the shadows? Was it just woman's deviltry? Whatever it was, Kalispel responded to it without doubt or hesitation.

He ran across the bench to the slope. He glided along that to the fence which inclosed Leavitt's claim. There he rested, regaining his breath, listening, peering for the guard. There was no sound, no moving object. He slipped among the boulders and stealthily made his way to the point almost opposite the cabin. A light shone from Leavitt's window. The door was closed. Footfalls attracted his attention. They were coming. Soon a dark form appeared. It grew blacker, took the shape of a man. He passed by close to the fence. When he was out of sight, Kalispel crossed the open space and hid behind the corner of the fence. He

drew his gun and knew his course of action. If he bungled, he would have to kill the guard; this he did not want to do unless compelled.

Presently the guard returned. He passed the corner scarcely a yard away. Kalispel took one quick step and struck the man a hard blow on the head with the butt of his heavy gun. The fellow dropped like a log, his rifle clattering to the ground. Kalispel knelt and rolled him over on his back, intending to bind his mouth and hands. But he had no scarf, and Kalispel did not want to leave a clue by using his own. Rising, he ran to the porch, leaped up to try the door. Barred! Listening a moment more, he sheathed his gun and hurried round to the window. It took but a moment to force it and climb into the cabin.

He turned up the lamp and cast a swift, keen gaze round the room, scrutinizing the lowest log of the wall. In several places that log was hidden by bed, bench, chest, table Kalispel dragged away the bed and felt with scrupulous care, searching for a joint. He did this all around that side and then the other. Each log ran the whole length of the wall. Behind Leavitt's table and under a canvas curtain where he hung his clothes Kalispel found what he was seeking.

His sharp fingernails halted at a smooth, scarcely perceptible joint. About four feet to the left of it he found another. With powerful hands he pressed the section of log, which slid out upon the floor, disclosing a dark hollow in the base log beneath.

Then as Kalispel bent over, the first object with which his eager hand came in contact was a large, long, leather wallet. It felt full of money. Kalispel could have yelled his glee. Blair's wallet!

The wallet was too large for Kalispel's pocket. It took but a moment for him to snatch a blanket from the bed. This he spread beside the aperture in the log and dropped the wallet upon it. Then he lifted out bag after bag of gold of various sizes—some canvas, but mostly buckskin. He did not desist until he had a pile of them that would have filled a bushel basket. Next he twisted the ends of the blanket and carried it to the window. He peered out. All quiet! It took all his strength to lower the heavy load down to the ground. Then he leaped out.

When he swung that improvised pack over his shoulder he calculated there was in excess of 100 pounds of gold in it. He wanted to make the welkin ring with his triumph. But never had he been more vigilant. He stepped out to the hard trail. The guard lay where he had fallen. Kalispel passed him and gained the boulders. Sheering to the left, he soon reached the base of the slope.

Only then did he relax to exult

and revel. He had done it. He had recovered Blair's money and he had taken what rightfully belonged to Sam Emerson.

"Gosh!" whispered Kalispel halting to rest his burden on a convenient boulder. "Even if we'd never made this strike, I'd have turned robber once, just to get even with this two-bit thief."

Of all the considerable feats Kalispel had ever achieved, this one gave him the most exultation. He was safe. He could never be apprehended. And nothing was any surer than that he could hide and keep this gold, which, added to what he had hidden, would make a fortune. He toiled on in short stages, careful each time to listen, to peer ahead, to make certain of his direction and safety. At last he reached his cabin, hot and wet, with bursting veins and throbbing heart, exhausted from over-excitement and exertion, but full of a satisfaction that made up for the loss of Sydney Blair.

When he got ready he would return her father's money to him with a few caustic words to Sydney anent where he had found it. And possibly some of the gold the miners had lost could be identified and returned to them. Then he had Jake to think of and plan for, to establish in life, and also Nugget and Sloan, and lastly himself. Somehow thought of the ranch, certain to be his if he lived, did not rouse the old joy.

Kalispel, all the while with whirling thoughts, concealed his treasure, assured that his hiding place could not be discovered without long and painstaking search.

The hour was late and he took advantage of this to burn the blanket.

"I reckon my high-minded Sydney would figure me out a thief," he soliloquized. "But why did she persuade him to tell where the gold was hidden, when she knew I was there?"

He went to bed without disturbing Jake, who slept like a log, and he lay there wide-eyed until the gray dawn.

That day Kalispel remained in camp, restless and watchful, working at small tasks, expecting any moment a posse of miners with Leavitt at their head. His loaded Winchester leaned against the door of the cabin, and he had an extra gun in his belt.

But afternoon came without any untoward event. Then when he espied Leavitt on Sydney's porch, apparently no more excited than usual, he concluded that the loss of the gold had not been discovered. Kalispel pondered over this amazing aspect of the situation. No doubt that guard knew how Charlie March had come to his untimely end. He might have recovered consciousness without its becoming known that he had been assaulted, and then in the interest of self preservation he had chosen

to keep his mouth shut. Kalispel reflected that he had left Leavitt's room as he had found it except for the purloining of the blanket. This loss, too, might not have been noticed.

"Dog-gone!" ejaculated Kalispel, rubbing his hands in glee. "My luck has changed. I'll play it to the limit."

About midafternoon Kalispel, watching, saw Rand Leavitt rise to make his departure. Either he wanted Sydney to accompany him downtown or she wanted him to stay there. In any event, they idled some moments at the head of the steps, in plain view of Kalispel—which was assuredly known to both—and at length Leavitt left. Kalispel watched him take the trail to town instead of the one across the bench toward his cabin.

Jake had keener observation than Kalispel had credited him with. "Brother, you're on edge today like a stiff wire in a cold wind," remarked Jake. "When are you goin' to kill him?"

"Him! Say, Jake, are you dotty? What's eatin' you?"

"Nothin'. I been watchin' you watchin' Leavitt down there sparkin' yore girl. An' I wouldn't give two bits for his life."

"Hell! Am I that easy? Wal, Jake, jealousy is pretty tough, an' what's more it's new to me."

"Has Leavitt added outrage to theft?" queried Jake, his big eyes flaring.

"He shore helped queer me with Sydney, but I reckon I was most to blame. I was responsible for bringin' the Blairs here. It has been ruin for them. Blair has gone to the bad an'—"

"Hey!" interrupted Jake. "Who's thet goin' up on Blair's steps?"

Kalispel wheeled and looked. A slight-statured boy in blue jeans had just mounted to Blair's porch. But when the sun caught a glint of golden hair, Kalispel realized with a start that the boy was not a boy.

"Nugget! Wal, I'll be damned! She swore she'd do it," ejaculated Kalispel.

"Do it? What? An' who's Nugget?"

"She's Dick Sloan's girl, an' she's callin' on Sydney Blair. Struck me funny, that's all."

"Lots of funny things happenin'. Kal, do you know thet they're hintin' you could tell a lot about these holdups?"

"Could I? My God, man, believe me I could—an' I will when I'm ready," cried Kalispel.

Kalispel riveted his gaze upon the Blair home. Nugget did not come out. The minutes dragged. She was making a lengthy call. Somehow Kalispel's sympathy was with Nugget, and, strangely, for the balance of the endless hour that the girl stayed there, Kalispel's thought was of her, not Sydney.

Finally she came out, to trip

down the steps, to run gracefully away, her hair shining in the sunlight. She did not take to the trail, but sheered off to disappear among the tents along the stream.

Scarcely had she gone out of sight when Sydney appeared on her porch, hesitatingly advanced to the rail and clung to it as if for support. For a moment she appeared bowed and shaken. Then she raised her head to gaze toward Kalispel's cabin.

She saw him sitting on his bench before the door. She waved her scarf, dropped it a moment, then waved again. Next she beckoned for Kalispel to come, and her action was urgent, appealing.

"Ump-umm, lady! Not me," Kalispel was muttering. "Not after last night! You can walk on me—an' spit on me—an' insult me scandalous, but when you gave that hombre what I yearned for an' never had—I was through!"

Sydney edged along the rail. Plainly she was gathering courage or strength to come to him. When she got as far as the porch post she clung to that and watched him, her posture and demeanor most expressive of trouble and weakness. At length she gave up and went into the cabin.

Kalispel gazed around in inexpressible relief. The sun had set, yet fan-shaped rays shot up toward the zenith and down into the valley. The broken clouds of purple and gold appeared edged with fire. And for a moment longer a marvelous color bathed the fringed peaks. Then it faded, and that fading of the exquisite glow appeared to resemble what had happened in Kalispel's heart.

That Sydney should wave to him, beckon for him, almost hold out her arms! That was as incredible as his strange callousness to her entreaty. Too late! He understood that. Not that she had failed him so often but that she had lightly given what he had regarded sacred!

Twilight fell and dusk mantled the valley floor. Jake called him to supper. Kalispel went in, shaking himself as if to throw off fetters. He ate without his usual gusto. Jake talked but Kalispel scarcely heard. Then came a timid knock on the cabin door.

Kalispel stared at the door. Another knock, fainter, brought him to his feet, on fire within and cold without. Slowly he swung open the door. The broad flare of lamplight shone upon Sydney Blair.

"Come in," he said, and as she entered he indicated Jake, who stood staring as if at an apparition. "My brother Jake—Miss Blair."

"Glad to meet you, miss," replied Jake.

Sydney bowed. Then her wide dark eyes traveled back to Kalispel. "I must see you alone.

"Jake, will you leave us?" said

Kalispel tensely. Jake went out. Kalispel turned up the lamp to increase the light. "Sydney, you look shaky. Please sit down."

She made no move to take the chair he offered. "Why did you not come?"

"Do you need to ask that?"

"You saw me wave and beckon and—hold out my hands to you like a drowning woman?"

"Yes, I saw you. An' I reckoned I'd spare you some pain—an' myself hell, if I didn't go."

"Then you *were* there last night!" Sinking on the couch, she covered her face with her hands. "I couldn't tell. Oh, I was mad!"

"Shore you were mad," he agreed. "Yes, I was there—an' when he kissed you somethin' in me cracked. I sneaked away then."

"That—was nothing," she whispered, revealing her shamed face. "He pulled me back to the hammock—made violent love to me. I forgot you. I—I thought I was in love with him. And I promised—to—marry him."

Kalispel's laugh was not harsh, but she flinched at it. "Ah-huh. An' after Nugget got through with you, Mr. Leavitt didn't rate such a good bargain, eh?"

Humbly she shook her head. "I loathe him!"

"Wal, Sydney, that gives me back a little of my respect for you. I reckon you got off easy. A few words of love, a hug or two, an' some kisses—they probably go terrible against the grain for so proud a girl as you. But there's no harm done. An' if you despise him—why, that ends it."

"Ends it, yes. But not my shame."

"That will wear away, Sydney. I reckon you felt the same when I mauled an' kissed you so scandalous."

"No. I was furious, but not ashamed."

"Wal, nothin' much can be done about it. An' *now* you want me to kill Leavitt?"

"Oh no, Kalispel, no!" she cried. "I don't care what he has done—what he *is*. But it'd be horrible to kill him. An' you cannot forever escape yourself!"

"Humph! You'd care a hell of a lot, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would care," she replied steadily, with unfathomable eyes on his.

"Wal, that doesn't matter at all. Ever since I first saw Leavitt an' read in his eyes that he'd done away with my brother, I've intended to kill him. An' I'm goin' to do it!"

" 'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord. 'I will repay,' " she quoted solemnly.

"Beautiful words, Sydney. But they don't go out here. What did Nugget tell you?"

With a little cry of distress, Sydney again covered her face.

"Never mind, if it hurts," he added, relenting. "I reckon I can

guess."

"I *will* tell you," she cried, poignantly, "if it kills me. She came. She stood in the door. She said, 'I want to tell you something.'—And I asked how she dared address me. 'I'm sorry you're like that,' she said. 'I'm wondering where Kalispel will get off.' I was amazed at her. She stood there white and cool, with the sweetest face, the bluest eyes—the very prettiest girl I ever saw. Then she came in and shut the door.

" 'You've given Kal Emerson a rotten deal,' she went on. 'And I'm here to call you for it. He was a wild cowboy. One way and another he has been driven to defend his name, his life, or someone who needed a friend, until he became notorious. He's what the West calls a gunman, a killer. But all the same he's a better, finer, truer man because of that. The West has to have such men. Don't *I* know? Good God! How many drunks, bums, thieves, adventurers, gamblers—how many low-down men do you guess I've seen shot in the street or dragged out of dance halls? Yes, and I've seen good boys like Kalispel go down—worse luck.

" 'You are to get it into your head, Miss Blair, that this Kal Emerson is a better man than your father, a better boy than your brother, if you have one. He was so clean an' straight—so true to *you*—that he could dance with me, be my friend, with never a word that you could not have been glad to hear. I loved him! He brought a boy to see me, Dick Sloan, and that boy, too, was clean and fine. He loved me. I treated him badly. I did all I could to make him despise me. I couldn't. Then Kal came for me—dragged me out of Borden's hall—scared me stiff because I thought he meant to beat me—and I can't stand that. Dick wanted to marry me and Kal made me promise. I'm living in Dick's tent now. And I might be his sister! We will be married as soon as it's possible. I'm free. I'd be—happy if—I could forget.' "

Sydney's husky, failing voice trailed off. For several moments there was silence.

"She fascinated me," went on Sydney. "And then she changed somehow. The scorn—the earnestness—the sweetness all fled. 'Now for your new lover, Leavitt,' she began, with a terrible look at me. 'I'll make short work of him—and the rest of this job. Rand Leavitt is two-faced, and one of his faces —the one *I* know—is that of a dog. I know he made away with Kalispel's brother and jumped his claim. But I can't prove it. He sold your father two worthless claims, which I *can* prove. If your father has been robbed, as I've heard, one of Leavitt's men did it. But *that* side of Leavitt is the least vile. All this time he's been making love to you he's been trying

to get me. Oh, you needn't glare at me! I can prove that, if you need proof. Any of the girls at Borden's will corroborate my statement. Leavitt played the gallant lover to you. He villified poor Kal and talked marriage to you. To *me* he showed the beast. In many ways you couldn't understand if I told you. But you'll understand this. He beat me when he couldn't get the best of me. He has beaten others of the girls. He likes to beat women.' "

Sydney panted in her agitation and for a moment could not continue.

"She saw I was faint," she presently went on. " 'I could tell you more, Miss Blair,' she continued. 'But unless you are mad indeed I've told enough. That is the kind of man Rand Leavitt is.' She left me without another word."

Kalispel paced to and fro in the confined space of the cabin, and tried to avert his face from his visitor. He divined that the most trying part of this interview might yet come.

"I have told you—about all," said the girl haltingly.

"Shore. An' it's been hard on you."

"Can you—forgive me?"

He was silent and stared fixedly at the smoldering fire.

"I was a proud, egotistical, conceited thing," she went on humbly "And out here only a tenderfoot. I thought I could stand it. I fear now I never can. Please forgive me!"

"I reckon. All except last night. That I can't forget—maybe in time."

"Kalispel, I do not know myself. I am weak or crazy—or both. I *was* jealous of that girl, Nugget. And yesterday I grew furious at you. I wanted to hurt you, drive you insane with jealousy. I *had* loved you. I thought you'd killed it. And in the end all I did was—promise to marry—Rand Leavitt."

"There was one thing I didn't understand, Sydney," queried Kalispel. "Why did you get Leavitt to tell you where he hid his gold, knowing I might be there to hear? You didn't think Leavitt was a thief then."

Sydney's face flamed scarlet. "I don't know, Kalispel. It was just part of my madness. Maybe I had an idea it might prove to me if you were a bandit. I wanted to believe the worst of you. Can't you understand? Or maybe I just wanted to show you how much Leavitt cared for me—to tell me where he hid his fortune. Oh, I don't know what it was—I was just out of my head."

Kalispel nodded. "I guess—I understand, Sydney," he said slowly. Then, "Sydney, what will you do?"

"Is there nothing—for you—and me?" she faltered.

"Hopeless," he burst out, with dry lips. "I am a gunman, a killer.

I mean to do for Leavitt an' Borden before I leave here. You are a lady, far above me, too fine for this bloody West. If you—you married me you'd be a pioneer's wife. You'd have to pitch hay, bake bread, cut off the turkey's head, milk the cows—an', as Jake said, look after a brood of kids. You see it isn't a pleasin' prospect."

"It would be if I were woman enough," she replied and rising faced him with eloquent eyes that made him weak. Then she moved toward the door.

"Aw! I'll see you home, Sydney," he replied hurriedly, and followed her out.

The night was dark and windy with storm in the warm air. He led the way for her among the boulders, and once had to take her hand. She clung to his a moment and then let go. They reached her porch without speaking again. She started up, then turned to him.

"No woman like me could ever love you like that girl does. No other woman could ever have such cause. It was a revelation to me."

"Aw, Sydney, you exaggerate. Nugget is grateful, of course, but—"

"She blazed with it," interrupted Sydney. "And out of this ghastly lesson I'll get most from that."

"I'm awful glad you see the kid fair an' straight now. She never was bad!"

"Thank God you saved her!" returned Sydney, with deep emotion. "Good night, Kalispel."

He bade her good night and wended a thoughtful and sad way among the boulders while the old black mountain rumbled its low thunder.

Chapter Twelve

Opening Skirmish

UNDER the dark and threatening sky, where he walked his beat, Kalispel was to find that love did not die so easily. Sydney still cared for him in some degree, enough to sue for his forgiveness and his allegiance.

But in the light of all her vacillation Kalispel realized that he was not the man to make her happy. The biggest thing he could do for Sydney was to conquer his longing for her, to renounce her beauty, and to let her go to a better and more suitable mate. He succeeded, but it was the bitterest victory of his life.

It did not leave him peace. The long strife wore his nerves raw. What seemed left was a stern duty to expel these softer emotions which had made him weak, and get back to the grim and hard passion that had obsessed him before this upheaval.

Jake returned to the cabin late, to find Kalispel burning the mid-

night oil. "Hello!" he said. "I allowed I'd let you have plenty of time with your lady-love."

"Wal, I had plenty, believe me," replied Kalispel gruffly.

"Peaches an' cream, thet girl, an' sweet on you, Kal, or I'm a born fool."

"You are a born fool, Jake."

"Reckon I better change the subject or get bored. Lots of talk downtown."

"What about?"

"Masters an' Leavitt have locked horns, it seems. You know Leavitt has been sore about Masters's election. Wal, they're at odds now about a vigilance committee. Masters wants one elected by the miners, with him, of course, at the head. An' Leavitt holds that he has power to appoint the vigilantes."

"Whew! That'll make a hell of a mess. Jake, keep this under your hat Leavitt is the boss of these bandits."

"Thunderation an' damnation! Are you shore, Kal?"

"Absolutely positive."

"Can you prove it?"

"I could to honest, fair-minded men. Not to Leavitt's crowd."

"An' that's the rub. Son, look here. If Leavitt organizes a band of vigilantes to catch an' hang his own outfit—that will be a hell of a mess."

"Worse. They'd hang me."

"I wish you'd bored thet bastard long ago," declared Jake. "What're we goin' to do?"

"Hang on an' see what comes off. How's the weather?" asked Kalispel, as he began to pull off his boots.

"Mistin' a little. But clouds breakin' some. It'll rain shore, sooner or later. Then it'll turn off cold an' winter will set in colder'n blue blazes."

Kalispel lay awake for a long while, and then slept late, far into the morning. Upon arising he shaved and then partook of a belated breakfast. Kalispel did not waste words that morning. From the open door he saw that the storm still held aloof. Securing Blair's wallet, he wrapped the bulky thing in a burlap sack and set out.

"Mind camp," he said to Jake. "From now on one of us must be here all day."

The hour was about noon. He found the kitchen door of Blair's cabin open. Father and daughter were at lunch. "Howdy. Excuse me, but this is sort of ticklish," said Kalispel, as he went in and closed the door.

Blair's greeting was cordial and curious. Sydney had been weeping.

"Can you be trusted—*now?*" he asked Sydney.

Sydney submerged the old outraged dignity, but it took an effort. Kalispel unwrapped the burlap sack and laid the wallet on the table."

"Can you be trusted to take care

of this yourself?" demanded Kalispel.

Blair leaped up in great excitement. "For the land's sake! My wallet! Let me feel—let me look!"

"No, I will," declared Sydney, after a gulp, and she snatched the wallet away from Blair's clutching hands. She opened it. "Yes—yes—the money appears to be all here. Oh, how glad I am! Kalispel, where did you get this wallet?"

"Where do you suppose?"

She flushed. "I—I did not mean anything. But where?"

"I stole it from Leavitt."

Blair cursed prodigiously.

"Sydney, it's not likely Leavitt will suspect you or search your house," said Kalispel. "But hide the wallet in your bed or on your person. An' never forget it. Pack your belongin's an' plan to leave the valley with one of these freighters as soon as this storm is over. I wouldn't advise it till then. You might get caught up on top. An' that'd shore not be any fun."

"Pack! Are you leaving, too?" she inquired tremulously.

"No. Not unless I get chased out."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and dropped her eyes. "Come back and let me thank you."

"Kal, I just noticed you're wearing two guns," said Blair, his eyes popping. "Must be going to a prayer meeting."

"Ornamental, that's all, Blair. So long," drawled Kalispel, and went out.

Thunder City did not look as if it had lost half of its inhabitants, for the thoroughfare was as crowded, as loud, as bustling as usual. But the fact was that at least half of the miners had decided against being snowed in on a bonanza diggings the bright bubble of which had burst.

Kalispel had no particular objective just then except to ascertain the facts about the Masters-Leavitt controversy. He went into one place after another. The business of buying, selling, freighting, eating, drinking, gambling, gossiping, prevailed as always. Far ahead he espied Haskell and Selby, the latter still with his arm in a sling, standing in front of the Dead Eye saloon. They crossed the wide street, obviously to let Kalispel pass.

At length he ran straight into Masters, who emerged from his office with no other than Borden.

"Hello! Just the man I'm lookin' for," ejaculated the sheriff.

"Wal, if you want anythin' short of arrestin' me you got to keep better company," replied Kalispel curtly.

Borden's swarthy face paled, his jaw bulged, his big eyes dilated, and with an imprecation he strode swiftly away up the street. Kalispel turned deliberately to watch him.

"Chip on yore shoulder, eh? An' packin' double hardware?" drawl-

ed Masters. "Will you come in an' have a little talk?"

Kalispel followed him into the little board shack without troubling to reply. The room contained a rude table piled high with papers, two boxes for seats, a sawed-off shotgun, and a rifle.

"I needn't tell you that walls have ears," warned Masters dryly, as he fastened his searching, eagle eyes upon his guest. "Our little plan to locate the bandits didn't work, eh?"

"Not yet. An' I reckon I'll lay off that," replied Kalispel.

"Just as wal. It might have turned out embarrassin' for me."

"Masters, I don't need to make bluffs to get a line on the bandits," declared Kalispel. "Do you want to know who's their chief?"

"Emerson, I'm not so damn' keen as I was," drawled the sheriff.

"Gettin' cold feet?"

"No. My feet air always warm an' they stay on the ground. I'm leery, Emerson. I want to find out more before I act."

"More about what—or who?"

"I reckon you could tell me, Emerson."

"I reckon I could. But it looks like I'm playin' a lone hand."

"You mean I've got to show my hand, heah? Declare myself for Kalispel Emerson or against him?"

"You savvy."

"Wal, I'll do that. I'd stack yore friendship against the enmity of Borden an' Leavitt any day. They're the men buckin' me heah."

"Straight talk from a Texan," returned Kalispel. "Shore you've heard this low-down hint about me bein' a bandit?"

"Yes. I've been asked to arrest you."

"Wal, I reckon if you go hobnobbin' all over town with me it'll offset their talk."

"Yes, an' raise a hell of a lot more. But I'll do it."

"All right. Now what's this vigilante deal?"

"Wal, it's the queerest deal I ever stacked up against," declared the Texan, dragging at his mustache. "I proposed to elect a vigilante committee. Judge Leavitt overruled me an' appointed the men himself."

"Has he already done it?"

"Shore. This mawnin'."

"How many?"

"I don't know. He didn't say. Borden, who I had in heah pumpin', didn't know, either. An' he didn't care a damn. He's out with Leavitt."

"Take a hunch from me, Masters," rejoined Kalispel. "Appoint another vigilante committee from the miners you know an' do it pronto."

"Youngster, what you drivin' at?"

"Masters, I'm not ready to come clean yet with all I know."

"Wal, you've made one thing damn' plain," declared the sheriff

gravely. "If I cain't trust Leavitt's vigilante committee, I cain't trust Judge Rand Leavitt."

"Take it as you like," said Kalispel coolly. "Come out now an' make good your friendliness for me."

"Son, I'll do thet little thing with pleasure."

They went out together, and Kalispel was about to lead his companion up the street when a young, heavy-booted miner halted to accost him.

"Ha, Emerson—hyar you—are," he panted. He was livid of face and sweating. Kalispel recognized one of Sloan's friends.

"What's come off?"

"Sloan! He's been beat—and knifed. Bad shape—I'm awful worried. Nugget sent me. I—run all—way to your cabin. Come."

"Holy—!" Kalispel leaped as one under the leash. "Masters, trail in on this."

They had almost to run to keep up with the young miner. By the time they reached the log bridge over the stream he had recovered sufficiently to be understood.

"I got it—this way," he said. "Sloan had a new claim—over in the brush. He laid off workin' it—an' this mornin' when he went there—it had been jumped by three men. Argument ended in a fight. Sloan was hurt serious. He crawled till he got help. They took him home—did all thet was possible for him. But we reckon he'll cash from the lung stab alone."

"Ah-huh," breathed Kalispel.

"Did Sloan recognize his assailants?" asked Masters.

"I didn't hear thet."

They turned up the trail which ran between tents and cabins and the stream. A knot of miners stood outside Sloan's cabin.

"You go in, Emerson," said the sheriff. "I'll talk to these men heah."

Kalispel entered. Besides Nugget and Sloan, who lay on the bed, there were two others present—a neighbor miner whom Kalispel knew by sight and a serious-faced woman, evidently his wife.

"Kal! It took you so long," said Nugget. "He wanted you so badly. And he's sinking now."

"I'm shore sorry," replied Kalispel. "I was downtown."

He approached the bed. Sloan lay dressed except for his boots, and his boyish face was ghastly of hue. Kalispel had seen the shade of death too many times not to recognize it here.

"Pard," whispered Sloan faintly. "Ruth—will—tell you."

Kalispel took the boy's limp, clammy hand. "Dick, it shore breaks my heart to see you this way. But don't give up. You might pull through."

Sloan's intense blue eyes appeared to burn with a fire not for himself. "Kal, would it be—askin' too much of you—to take care of

Ruth?"

"It shore would not."

"She has no—other friend. You saved her."

"I'll take care of her, Dick," said Kalispel, squeezing the cold hand.

"Thanks, pard," Sloan said, more clearly. "Thet was makin'—me hold on."

"Don't talk. Only give me a hunch. You told Ruth all you know?"

"Yes," replied Sloan, appearing to rally as he reached weakly for the girl. Quickly she took his hand in hers and, kneeling, pressed it to her breast. "Ruth—thet horrible fear—is gone. Kal will look after you— Some day—"

"Dick, I would never have gone back," she interposed softly. "You must not talk so much. Rest, and fight the thing, Dick. While there's life there's hope."

He smiled faintly and closed his eyes wearily. A trace of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth. Ruth wiped it away. He lay still, breathing slowly.

After a few moments Ruth released his hand and stood up. Kalispel found that Dick had let go of him. Then Kalispel drew the girl away. At that juncture Masters entered and went up to Sloan's bed to gaze silently down, shaking his lean head. He turned then to whisper:

"We cain't do nothin'. Shore you got his deposition?"

"Ruth did. Masters, you take these folks out an' leave me alone with her."

When the Texan had complied, Kalispel turned to Ruth. She was pale but composed, and outside of a hunted expression in her blue eyes betrayed no other marked evidence of emotion.

"Nug—Ruth, are you up to talkin' now?" he asked earnestly.

"Yes."

"Who do you think is back of it?"

"Borden."

"Why?"

"Two days straight running he has been here. Last time I had to fight to keep him from packing me off. I kicked and bit and screamed. He went out to run into our neighbors who'd heard me. When I heard him lie to them I went out too, and told the truth. Called him I don't know what, right before them. Then he left, white with rage. I *know* he is behind this attack on poor Dick."

"Yet he might not be."

"I feel it. A woman *never* makes a mistake when she feels that way."

"I feel it too. But, Ruth, we must have facts. These miners are in an ugly mood. Did you know Leavitt has organized a vigilante band of his own, with himself as leader? I reckoned he an' Borden had split. But so far as I'm concerned he'd take Borden's side. I must have facts."

"Kal, I have facts as to Dick's assailants, but I can't connect Borden with them."

"Ah-huh. All right, you might as well tell me now."

"Dick left early this morning," she began, "to work his new claim. He hired Presbry, a neighbor miner, to work this claim here, on shares. It is about panned out. Dick's new claim is way across the valley, up high, among the rocks and brush. I've been there. It is hard to get to. Well, I don't know how long ago—two hours, maybe, men came packing Dick in here, all bloody and dirty, terrible to see. He had been stabbed in the back and beaten over the head. While we worked over him as best we could he talked.

"He found that his new claim had been jumped. There were three men, one of them digging. Dick had seen him before, but did not know him. They seemed friendly at first, as if he ought to take it for granted they had a right to jump his claim. But as Dick had visited that claim every day, he did not agree with them. They argued, and finally Dick got sore. He jumped in the hole to throw the man out.

"Then began a fight, in which the other men joined. In the scuffle one of them called out, 'Don't shoot! You might hit Mac!' This man in the hole, then, was the one named Mac. Dick said he had a stubby red beard and a bloody patch pasted over a recent wound just above his ear. One of the two above stabbed Dick in the back. The blade went clear through in front. Then they beat him over the head. When Dick came to he was alone. He walked and crawled down within call of the miners who carried him home—and that's all, I think."

"Did they rob him?"

"Oh, I forgot. Yes, his watch, gun, money, everything was taken. And his pockets turned inside out."

"Pretty slick. Robbery motive, eh? Wal, we know enough. Ruth, that fellow Mac is one of Leavitt's trusted guards. An' *I* made that wound on his head."

"Let him go, Kal—let them all go!" she begged, suddenly changing from the calm, cold girl who had related Sloan's story.

"Ruth, you ask that?"

"Yes. It's too late to save Dick. And even if you *are* Kalispel Emerson you might get killed."

"Shore. Only that's not the way to meet this situation. If I showed yellow I'd stand a heap more chance of cashin'. Besides, Borden would get you shore."

"We could leave Thunder City as soon—as—" she faltered. "Kal, can't *you* see something, too?"

"I see a lot, Ruth. An' the biggest thing is for me to go on the rampage. Borden an' Leavitt are white-livered, an' their men are not the real stuff. They shoot in

the dark an' knife in the back. I'm goin' to wipe out some of them an' scare the rest of them stiffer'n a crowbar. That, with the proofs I have, will wake up these miners. Masters is on our side."

"Oh, Kal—suppose—" she choked, and sank against him, quivering.

Kalispel held her, suddenly troubled with the memory of Sydney's statement about this girl.

Ruth drew away from him, all trace of weakness vanished. "You know best, Kal," she said with composure. "It is not for me to try to stay your hand. Go—and don't worry about me."

"That's the way to talk, Ruth," he rejoined, hiding his own feeling. "Looks like Dick is unconscious. Reckon he won't come to again. Ruth, don't worry now about me."

Kalispel strode out slowly, gazing back at Ruth There was a girl who understood a man. Once out of the door, he was himself again. Masters stood outside, talking to the couple.

"Folks, go inside an' stay with Ruth," begged Kalispel. "Masters, you come with me."

They had crossed the bridge and reached the main street when the Texan broke the strained silence. "Youngster, you're aimin' to play a lone hand?"

"I reckon."

"Wal, I calculate I'd back you up."

"Masters, I'd be most damned glad to have you line up with me on this deal," said Kalispel forcefully. "But if I got in deep an' dragged you in, why, you might not be left to look after your friends. An' believe me, if we got bored, they'd shore need it."

"Emerson, you're hintin' of a Henry Plummer outfit. An' I reckon thet's far-fetched. Neither Leavitt or Borden air Plummer's caliber. An' the rest of this gang air four-flushers."

"My idea, too. But this gang may be bigger than I've figured."

"No matter. Without leaders they'd wilt like yellow paper in a blaze."

"The only thing I'm leery about is bein' picked from some door or window."

"Wal, thet's not liable to happen if I hang close to you."

"Look for a stocky man with a stubby red beard an' a bloody patch over his right ear. They call him Mac," said Kalispel.

In the town there was no indication that the killing of Sloan had become the latest news. But talking and walking miners and other inhabitants of Thunder City were not slow to take cognizance of Bruce Masters and Kalispel stalking up the street.

"Hey!" called one excited observer. "Looks like Sheriff Masters has arrested thet gunman."

"Not to me, it doesn't," replied

another.

They entered the Dead Eye saloon. It was blue with smoke and noisy with voices.

"Say, crowd," shouted Kalispel piercingly, and when the hum ceased and all faces turned, he continued: "I'm lookin' hard for a man with a stubby red beard an' a patch over his right ear where he got slugged recently. He answers to the name of Mac."

Every man present, even the card players, looked at his neighbors. Then a bartender set down a glass with a nervous clang.

"Boss, nobody in hyar who answers to thet," he called.

Kalispel led the way out, and he heard the buzz that arose behind him. He merely glanced into the stores. But he went into the Gold Dust saloon, the Elk, the Bonanza, the Thunder Boom, all the resorts on the right side of the street, in each of which he interrupted gayety to spread silence and consternation. But he did not find his man. By this time a crowd followed at a respectful distance and the whole tenor of the main street had changed as if by magic.

"Wal, Kalispel," said the Texan, as they crossed the street at the extreme east end of town, "looks like you'd have to hole them up. An' when you're outside of a barricaded cabin, up ag'in' shotguns an' rifles, it gets testier'n hell. As a ranger I had a lot of thet."

They paced downstreet on the right side, passing the blacksmith shop, some closed tents, and a merchandise store. As far down as Kalispel could see men were gazing in his direction, and not a few of their number were taking to the middle of the street. In the Red Likker saloon Kalispel's ringing challenge elicited a reply from someone in the crowd:

"What you want Mac fer?"

"He an' his pards jumped Dick Sloan's claim."

"Wal, thet ain't sayin' what you want," replied the gruff voice.

"Sloan's dyin'!" Kalispel advanced upon the group before the bar and ordered them to spread out. His swift scrutiny failed to locate a man with a stubby red beard. He backed out of the saloon, keenly aware of hostile looks. On down the street he went, searching in the places where miners congregated. Opposite the Dead Eye saloon Kalispel espied a tall bearded man who strode across in a manner to excite a second glance. As he passed Kalispel he shot out low-voiced: "Your man's been tipped off—Dead Eye saloon!"

Kalispel halted.

"Heah thet?" queried Masters sharply. "I reckon I'll stand aside now, Emerson."

It was 100 or more long steps diagonally across the street to the Dead Eye saloon. When the Texan moved on a little way and then faced about, it appeared to be a signal for every

man in sight of Kalispel to halt.

"There! Masters has shied away," said one.

"He ain't drunk *this* time, shore."

"Who's he after?"

"He's watchin' the Dead Eye."

"We'll be duckin' lead pronto."

Kalispel cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled, "Somebody tell Sneed to drive Mac an' his pards out—or I'll burn 'em out."

A man shouted into the door of the Dead Eye.

Bill Sneed appeared, opening wide the swinging doors of his saloon. *"Git out!"* he bellowed. "I ain't harborin' ye, by God!"

Two white-faced men sneaked out, followed by a third, whose sombrero, pulled low, failed to hide the betraying red beard. The first slipped like an eel into the backing throng. The others dashed into the street, sheering widely to the left.

"Stop!" yelled Kalispel, and he shot at the foremost runner. The bullet kicked up the dust beyond and whined away. But it had hit the runner, for there was a violent break in his swift action. Kalispel's second shot, aimed low, brought the last man down in the middle of the street. Like a crippled fowl he flopped, attempted to get to his feet again, but fell, screaming all the time.

Then as Kalispel leaped forward into the street the man raised himself from the hips and pulled his gun, to fire rapidly. The bullets splintered glass and thudded on wood, and caused a rush of onlookers to get out of range. Kalispel plunged to a halt and shot to kill. His adversary spun around and went down, while his gun slid in the dust. Kalispel leaped forward to his prostrate foe, glad to find him alive. The second bullet had taken him high up in the breast.

"Howdy, Mac," called Kalispel grimly, as he stood over him with smoking gun. The black sombrero lay in the dust and Kalispel had needed no more to recognize his man.

"Masters, come here an' bring somebody," yelled Kalispel to the sheriff. Then he bent his gaze upon the claim jumper. "Sloan marked you, Mac."

"Is he—daid?" queried Mac hoarsely.

"I reckon, by this time."

"Don't kill me—Emerson. I'll talk."

Masters came hurriedly up, accompanied by two miners.

"Mac, I reckon you won't cash if you don't get bored again," said Kalispel, deliberately aligning his gun at the fallen's man's heart. "Talk—or I'll bore you again!"

"Fer God's sake, Emerson! I didn't knife Sloan—or slug him, either. I was for robbin' an' kidnappin' him—so Borden could get —Nugget!"

Chapter Thirteen

Guns in the Street

LIKE wildfire the news spread up and down the main street of Thunder City that Macabe, one of Leavitt's guards, had confessed having been forced by Borden to put young Sloan out of the way. Rumor ran as fast as men could walk and their tongues could wag. The populace was becoming inflamed to an increasingly dangerous degree.

Kalispel patrolled the center of the wide street, the cynosure of all eyes. The tide had turned his way. The creed of the frontier would force Borden to meet him.

Sunset was still several hours away. Kalispel's beat covered the lower end of town, just out of rifle range from Borden's place. Borden had been located at once and informed of Macabe's confession and that there was a man waiting for him out in the street.

Toward midafternoon business, except that of drinking, ceased for the day. Everybody wanted to see the encounter between Kalispel and Borden. If there were exceptions, they were Leavitt and his men up at the mine. They had been told. Leavitt had refused to protect Borden from Emerson. "Tell the girl-snatcher to go out and take his medicine!" was Leavitt's reply. Gossip quickly added the fact of Leavitt's half interest in Borden's property, and that the mine-owner would not be unhappy to take over Borden's half.

The lower end of the street was deserted except for Kalispel's solitary form, pacing to and fro, or standing motionless and menacing.

Dick Sloan's neighbor, the young miner, detached himself from the crowd and strode out to Kalispel.

"Better give me elbow room," warned Kalispel.

But the young fellow came on unheeding. "Emerson, it's over," he said hoarsely, his face pale and set. "Sloan died without comin' to."

"No surprise to me. I gave him up. How'd Ruth take it?"

"Game as they come. She's with me. We was huntin' you."

"Let the crowd know that Sloan's dead."

"I've already sprung it. They're with you, Kal."

The tragic death of Nugget's would-be husband was the last spark that precipitated an explosion. Mutterings and curses augmented direct calls to Kalispel.

"We're with you, old Montana!"

"Bore him low down, Kal!"

"Go in after the yellow dog!"

"If you want us to rout him out —say the word!"

Such outspoken ejaculations

served to unleash the passion of the mob. They merged closer and closer to Kalispel, forming a dense circle behind him across the street, and gradually edged him foot by foot toward Borden's hall. This largest building in the town was the last upon the street, and presented for once a lonely aspect. Doors and windows appeared like dark, vacant eyes. It stood isolated, apparently deserted.

The impatient mob, thirsty for blood, called for Borden.

"Come out, Borden!"

"Hyar, you skunk! Mac has squealed an' Sloan is dead! Come on!"

"Borden, we all want to see you!"

"Walk out like a man, you — —!"

"An' let us see daylight through yore gizzard! Haw! Haw!"

A leather-lunged miner bawled, "Smoke him out!"

A roar attested to the mood of the watchers. *"Burn him out!"*

And the stentorian-voiced miner rent the air: *"Borden come out an' fight—or we'll lynch you!"*

The cry, "Lynch him!" was caught up and carried along like a wave until Masters ran out to confront the crowd. "Steady, men," he yelled. "Give Emerson time! We don't want a lynchin'. An' fire might destroy the town. I'll guarantee to fetch Borden out!"

"All right, Sheriff But no arrest goes hyar. We want to see Borden shot or swing!"

Masters sped swiftly to confront Kalispel. "Thet gang's in an ugly mood. They might set fire to Borden's place. An' thet'd be hell. These shacks would burn like tinder. You better let me go in after Borden."

"He's hid in there," warned Kalispel. "He might shoot you."

"I'll take thet risk. An' if I get to him, I'll make him see thet shore as God made little apples this mob will burn him out an' hang him. An' I'll agree to protect him from them if he kills you. Thet'll fetch him. It's his only chance."

"Suppose he bobs up with a rifle?"

"Wal, then I'll bore him myself," replied the Texan.

"Masters, I don't like the deal. It's plumb good of you. But it'll queer you with Leavitt."

"To hell with Leavitt. One at a time! Do I go?"

"Shore. An' thanks, old-timer."

Masters swung away, pulling out a white handkerchief which he began to wave. The crowd yelled both encouragingly and derisively.

It was more than 200 yards from where Kalispel stood to the dance hall. When Masters got halfway there he shouted, and went on, still waving the white handkerchief. And when he got within 100 feet of the hall, Borden suddenly appeared in the doorway with a leveled rifle.

"Halt!" he yelled.

Masters lowered his flag of truce. His clear voice rang out:

"Air you drunk or crazy? Drop yore rifle. The mob back there will burn you alive or hang you, shore."

"What you want?" yelled Borden and lowered the weapon. Masters went forward then, talking fast, but Kalispel could not distinguish what he said. Masters approached to within 30 steps of Borden, who still held his rifle threateningly. Masters's posture did not lose dignity, but his few gestures were singularly expressive of the finality of a cold ultimatum. He whirled on his heel, and swerving out of line to the left, he strode rapidly up the street toward the crowd.

Kalispel watched that rifle. The crowd seemed locked in suspense, waiting, with eyes on the two principals. Into this oppressive lull the leather-lunged miner projected his raw yell:

"Take your choice, Borden!"

And the shout that burst from the crowd proclaimed that every watcher divined what the choice was—to drop the long-range rifle and come out like a man, or use it and swing by the neck. Certainly Borden understood, for he lifted the rifle high to fling it down. The metallic crash of its contact with the flagstones came plainly to the listening ears.

"Wal, Emerson, he's comin' an' we're gamblin' you'll bore him low in the middle," yelled the miner.

Borden whipped out two guns, and lowering his head, like a bull about to charge, he leaped out of the doorway.

"Spread out everybody!" boomed the miner with the clarion voice. "The ball's opened!"

Kalispel started to stride forward, drawing his gun. Borden gained the center of the street and, like a man propelled by irresistible force from behind, came lurching on. He threw forward the gun in his left hand and fired. The ball whizzed by Kalispel, glanced on the gravel behind, and brought a shrill yell from some person in the crowd. Shouts and trample of feet attested to the splitting of the mob to both sides of the street.

Kalispel kept on swiftly. Borden halted His gun flamed red and cracked. Another bullet hissed uncomfortably close to Kalispel's body. Far beyond it struck up dust and ricocheted along the street. Again Borden strode on and again his big gun boomed. Then *bang! bang! bang!* he emptied the gun in his left hand, as if driven to be free of it. He flung it aside and raised the one in his right.

Kalispel stopped to turn his side toward his adversary, upon whom he brought his gun to bear. The distance was far over 100 yards. Kalispel froze in his aim and pulled trigger.

Everybody heard the sudden impact of that bullet. Borden's hurried stride appeared blocked as if by a battering ram. He uttered a choking cry, but began to shoot. Deliberate and cold, Kalispel took time, well knowing that this was no game for snap-shooting, and aimed as at a target, while Borden's first and second bullets passed whistling by Kalispel, one on each side. Kalispel shot. And Borden was knocked flat, as if by a hard fist.

In frenzied action he sprang up like a bent willow released, and shot wildly. But something about Kalispel's posture, his statue-like immobility, his dark, terrible calm, pierced Borden's chaotic brain. He essayed to take his cue from his adversary. Dropping on one knee he rested his elbow on the other, and steadying his gun, took slow and careful aim.

A suspended breath seemed to wait in the onlookers. A woman screamed as if she could not stand the deliberation for which Kalispel was famed.

The silence burst to the ringing crack of his gun. Borden's rigidity underwent a break. His gun fell to explode and he appeared to be batted to one side, as by an invisible force. On hands and knees, his back to the crowd, he wrestled himself almost erect, then suddenly plunged down on his face to kick the dust and lie still.

Standing alone in the street, with the breathless crowd beginning to stir, Kalispel stood over his prostrate enemy to watch him die. It was one of the prerogatives of gunmen, to be in at the death, and owed its origin to the incentive to make sure that the enemy did die. In Kalispel's case it was an ordeal, where ruthlessness gave way to a sickening remorse.

Borden tried to articulate, then died with something like relief on his ghastly face.

Kalispel hurried down the street to avoid the surging crowd. He made his way out of town and down the stream to the bend and up to the sage slope where he had often gone. The hour was past sunset, crimson and gold, tranquil and sad. The relentlessness of man with his love, his hate, his avarice, did not intrude here.

Dusk fell. He could tarry no longer. A chill air floated down the canyon. Nighthawks and bats were fluttering. He left the fragrant sage bench and retracing his steps, crossed the bridge to Sloan's tent. Several miners and Barnes, the kindly partner of Sloan, met Kalispel and informed him that they had just buried Sloan on his own claim in the deep hole where he had dug for gold and had found a grave.

"Barnes, I'll be takin' the girl up to my cabin," said Kalispel. "Sloan's claims an' tools are yours. An' I won't forget your friendship for him—an' your goodness to

her."

"Aw—thet's nothin'," replied Barnes haltingly.

Kalispel went into the tent. The interior was almost too dark to discern objects.

"Ruth," he called, "where are you?"

"Kal!" she cried, and her light feet pattered on the floor. He made out her pale form against the gloom. Then she was clinging to him with her head pressed against his breast

"Wal? Don't shake so, child," he said gently, as he held her. "Barnes told me they'd buried Dick right here. I reckon that was the thing—to get it over."

"Yes. I told them to."

"Can't you stand on your feet?" he asked, finding that he had to hold her.

"My legs are—shaky."

"But, Ruth—you're the gamest kid. This is gold diggin's life, you know. Shore it is awful tough, your losin' Dick—but it's done—it's over, an' you got to brace."

"Kal, I'm terribly sorry about Dick," she whispered, and then suddenly she clutched him, "but—but it was your fight with Borden—that knocked me out."

"Aw! Didn't Barnes drag you off the street?"

"I stayed. Oh, how I wanted you to kill him! And I knew you would. I gloated over the thought. But when Borden plunged out, like a mad bull—then I went to pieces. I suddenly realized—he might kill you, too. I saw it all—Then I collapsed."

"Ah-huh. . . . Wal!" ejaculated Kalispel, strangely affected by her poignant words and clinging hands. "Ruth," he got out, at length, "I'm takin' you up to my cabin."

"Kal! I'm glad, but I can't walk."

"I'll carry you." He lifted her and swung her around comfortably against his shoulder and edged sideways through the door.

"Barnes," he said to the waiting miner, "would you be good enough to have your wife pack up all Ruth's clothes an' things, an' bring them up to my cabin?"

"Shore'll be glad to," was the reply.

Kalispel took the trail up the stream. Here and there lamps cast a yellow glow through doors or canvas, and camp fires flickered, silhouetting burly, red-shirted miners at their evening meal.

When Kalispel passed the Blair cabin, almost under its high porch, he saw a light and heard Sydney's voice. He tightened his hold on the slender form in his arms. And he was unable for the moment to straighten out his conflicting emotions.

They passed the last shack. Kalispel had been increasingly aware that Ruth's head had slipped from his shoulder closer and closer until her cheek rested

against his neck. It felt warm and moist. She was crying.

Jake was stirring around the camp fire outside the cabin. He heard Kalispel's footsteps and straightened up to peer out into the darkness.

"It's me, Jake."

"Aw! Shore glad, son. I saw your meetin' with Borden. All same Kalispel Montana! Suited me fine. . . . Hey! what you packin?—A girl! If you don't beat the Dutch!"

"Shut up an' light the lamp in the cabin."

Jake knocked things over in his hurry to execute that order. He stared with rolling ox eyes at the white-faced, golden-haired girl Kalispel laid on the couch. Ruth sat up.

"I'm not an invalid," she said, with a wan smile. "Howdy, Jake. Your brother has packed me up here."

"I see," replied Jake with a broad grin. "I reckon you're the girl—"

"Ruth," interrupted Kalispel shortly. "Jake, put a canvas up outside the cabin. An' take your bed out. You an' me will bunk together."

"So our family's increased permanent?" rejoined Jake beamingly.

"Our family's shore increased permanent," drawled Kalispel. "Rustle now, an' get some supper first."

When Jake went out, whistling, Kalispel turned to the girl, sensing full well that he was in for what he knew not.

"Kal, let's have it out now," she said.

"Out! Have what out?" he queried.

"This deal."

"Gosh, child—"

"I heard what you promised Dick. You said, 'I'll take care of her, Dick'! What did you mean by that?"

"I meant what I said."

"You'll be my friend—my brother—as Dick was?"

"No. Didn't Dick intend to marry you?"

"Yes."

"Wal, that's what I meant."

"You'd *marry* me—Kal?" she cried. "You are the most wonderful— But, Kal, you're in love with Sydney Blair!"

"I reckon I was, tolerable. But when she dared me to come over an' see her in Leavitt's arms—an' I took that dare— Wal, it all died, pronto."

"Oh, Kal, *she* wouldn't—she couldn't do such a thing."

"The hell she wouldn't," flashed Kalispel, stung by the memory. "She did do it. I saw Leavitt kiss her."

"Oh, she must have been driven. But, Kal, do you think Dick meant for you to marry me?"

"Shore he did. How else could a man take care of you?"

"Very well, then," she replied with a dangerous softness. "I won't marry you."

"Why not?"

"I won't, that's all," she rejoined, and averted her agitated face.

"Ah-huh. Wal, shore I'm no match for Sydney Blair or for *you* either. Kal Emerson! Bad hombre! Tough cowboy! Rustler! Gunslinger! All-around desperado who no woman atall would be wife to!" ejaculated Kalispel.

"Don't lie that way about yourself," she retorted. "You're Western and you're great, Kal Emerson I won't have you demean yourself to me."

"Never mind my promise to Dick I'd have asked you to marry me, anyhow."

"Oh, Kal! Don't! God knows it's hard to refuse—"

"Wal, why won't you?"

"Because I love you," she cried passionately.

"Wal, then, that's all the more reason for you to be my wife."

"It is not."

"Ruth, we're off the trail," he said soberly. "When I thought of marryin' you it wasn't just to get a wife—a woman. I always wanted a real home, a wife to keep me straight, an' kids—"

"Hush!" she sobbed, and put her hand to his lips. "I love you, Kal. I will live with you, be faithful till my dying breath, work my fingers to the bone for you, but I will not marry you!"

"I'm distressin' you, Ruth," he said. "But, one more word. If you won't marry me you can't be my real wife. Savvy, dear?"

"Yes, I savvy," she whispered, sagging against him.

"Forget it now, Ruth. There's so much to think of. To plan for! An' I've much to do before we leave here."

"*Leavitt!*" she cried.

"Yes. I meant to kill him. I ought to."

"Kal, it's not for me to—to stop you. Not to serve *him*, of all men! Only—today! Can I stand that again?"

"Wal, don't worry, maybe Masters will take care of him."

Jake opened the door a half inch. "Hey, Romeo an' Juliet! Will you have supper served in the drawin'-room or out on the balcony?"

Chapter Fourteen

"Run for Your Lives!"

DURING the night the equinoctial storm broke. Jake got up to reinforce his end of the improvised shelter. "Hey, Kal, is it wet over where you are?" he called.

"Ump-umm," replied Kalispel sleepily.

"Wal, it's wetter'n hell over hyar," growled Jake. "Thet storm

finally busted an' I'll bet it'll be a humdinger. Might as wal wake up an' get ready to be washed away. Whew! Blazes an' brimstone! Kal, I wish we was safe out of this hole."

"So do I," replied Kalispel, sitting up. A blue-white blaze filled the valley with weird light and a ripping thunderbolt rent the heavens. And before the booming echoes ceased reverberating, another flash of lightning streaked the inky blackness and a mighty sound as of mountains rolling down deafened Kalispel. Soon rain fell in torrents.

Kalispel and Jake huddled close to the cabin wall, and by covering themselves and their blankets with a tarpaulin managed to keep dry. Toward dawn the violence of the storm subsided and the rain slackened. Morning broke dreary and gray.

The stream was roaring. Kalispel went over to look at it. Miners all along, as far down as he could see, were trying to rescue rocks, flumes, boxes, tools from the yellow flood. It was bank-full and rising rapidly. Many of the claims would be flooded.

Thunder City would continue to roar, but not with labor. The saloons and halls and dens would reap a harvest.

As always, Kalispel swept an appreciative gaze across to the bare slope. This morning it presented a furrowed front. Thin yellow streams were running down its face, flattening out on the level to triangular areas of mud and silt. It presented an ugly sight. Far up, the peak was obscured in gray cloud.

Kalispel returned to the cabin. Jake was fanning a refractory camp fire which he had started under the shelter.

"I reckon it'd be a good idea to wrangle our burros an' horses," Kalispel remarked thoughtfully.

"Shore would, an' grain 'em good before they drill out."

"All right, let's rustle breakfast," replied Kalispel, brightening with the definite decision. "Then you go downtown an' buy a sack of grain, a pair of *alforjas* —I want two new strong ones—an' let's see. I'll rustle the stock."

"Kal, hadn't you better stay in camp an let me do the rustlin'?" queried Jake gruffly. "You got the girl hyar, an' our cabin is shore strong built. With them two rifles you could keep off—"

"Hell!" ejaculated Kalispel. "I reckon I had. But after yesterday, wouldn't you figure Leavitt to lay low an' let me shake the dust of Thunder City?"

"You had hell yesterday an' you ain't thinkin'. I've a hunch Leavitt had somethin' up his sleeve organizin' them vigilantes."

"Ah-huh. Wal, I'll think," snapped Kalispel. "An' I'm thinkin' I'd better see Masters pronto."

"I'll send him up hyar," replied

Jake hurriedly. "After we eat I'll rustle. An' you get to packin'. This storm will let up today, an' in a couple days we can be on the move."

Jake returned to report that Masters had been flooded out, like many others who had tents and shacks close to the treacherous slope of silt. Masters would call on him later in the day. But the busy hours passed by without the sheriff putting in an appearance. Jake finally rounded up all the stock, and with them in the corral, Kalispel began to have visions of the long winding trail down to the Salmon. Suddenly, then, he remembered the ranch he had coveted so dearly; and with a sense of exultation, he realized that he had the gold to buy and improve and stock a dozen such ranches. Ruth must be his wife.

It had rained on and off until midafternoon, when the clouds broke, showing a bit of blue sky and a gleam of sun. Ruth emerged and wandered around among the huge boulders, going as far as the stream, which was now a torrent. She came back to tell how the miners were moving back off their claims.

Kalispel had hidden his bags of gold dust and nuggets under the flat hearthstone in front of the open fireplace. Beneath this was a hollow boulder, the opening of which he had discovered by accident and which would not be easily detected. For the present he did not want either Jake or Ruth to learn about his treasure.

That night while Ruth slept and Jake worked outside, Kalispel packed the gold in two *alforjas* and hid them under the pile of firewood in the corner of the cabin.

When at length he went out to go to bed, Jake remarked with great satisfaction, "It's clearin' off cold." The stars were shining white, and a nipping wind blew down from the heights. Before Kalispel went to sleep, he had decided that it would be sensible to try to avoid trouble with Leavitt. If anything happened to him, Ruth might be left alone.

The day dawned frosty and bright. Miners were astir early, and two pack trains left while Jake was getting breakfast.

"They're beginnin' to drift out," said Jake. "An' I'll have all our pack saddles an' harness mended today."

"Brother, I reckon you're not in any hurry at all to shake the gold dust of Thunder City," drawled Kalispel.

Ruth came out, wearing a gray woolen dress, and with some color in her cheeks this morning, she made a picture from which Kalispel found it difficult to keep his eyes. She extended her small hands to the fire. "Gee! it's cold. I don't see that you gentlemen have pro-

ceeded far with breakfast."

"My land! We jest got up," retorted Jake, who had taken a decided liking to Ruth and delighted to serve her.

"Ruth, do you like cold weather?" asked Kalispel thoughtfully.

"Love it. I came from Wisconsin, you know."

"Ump-umm, I didn't know. An' can you ride a horse?"

"Can a duck swim? My dad moved to Wyoming when I was twelve," Ruth answered. "He bought out a rancher near Chadron. I left there only three years ago. Dad did well for a while—until the rustlers cleaned him out. He never got over that. It killed him. I was left to the tender mercy of a stepmother. And, well—I was sixteen when I came to Cliff Borden's dance hall.

"Don't look so—so terrible, Kal," she continued. "I had to work or starve—and Borden lied to me about the job. But it's all over now. And, Kal, when we're away from this we'll forget. Then I'll make it up to you."

"Let's get away pronto," replied Kalispel with one of his flashes of passion. "This afternoon or tomorrow, shore. Jake, rustle breakfast. Then pack. Put Ruth's bags in the canvas packs. Soon as I eat a bite I'll rustle down to see Masters. I want to tip him off. An' I reckon—that'll let me out here."

"You reckon? Aren't you sure, Kal?" queried Ruth.

"Gosh! you can't be shore of anythin' except death."

"Promise me you won't look up Leavitt," she entreated.

"Wal, that's easy. I promise. But if I meet him—"

"Bore him an' rustle back here to tell me," interrupted Jake coolly. "An' then I'll show you some real packin'."

Soon Kalispel sallied forth on his last visit to Thunder City. At Blair's cabin two packers were busy assorting and weighing packs. Burros, not yet saddled, stood haltered to the porch. Blair waved cheerfully to Kalispel. "We're leaving today."

Kalispel replied just as cheerfully: "So are we. Hope we see you on the trail."

Sydney appeared in the rider's garb in which Kalispel had admired her so exceedingly. Those proud dark eyes watched him pass by, intent and haunting as ever. But she made no motion.

On the hillsides and high parts of the benches the miners had returned to their blasting, digging, panning. But two miles of flooded claims along the stream had left hundreds of men idle. Therefore the main street of Thunder City presented the spectacle of a circus day in a small town.

Kalispel found Masters in his half-demolished shack, a pondering and somber man.

"Howdy, Kal," he drawled. "You look fine for a hombre who's

just added another notch to his gun."

"Aw, I'm fine as silk. Leavin' today, Masters."

"Good. Did your brother give you my message?"

"All he said was that you'd be up to see me."

"Nix. I told him no—an' for you to rustle out of heah quick."

"Wal, he didn't tell me, the son-of-a-gun. What's up, old-timer?"

"Leavitt took over Borden's property on half shares an' debts, he claims. My show of friendship for you 'pears to have riled the judge. He politely sent me word to turn over my office an' my badge."

"The hell he did! Masters, you wouldn't think of that?"

"Wal, ordinarily I wouldn't. But most of my friends have packed an' gone. The bottom is droppin' out of this boom, Kal. I reckon I couldn't locate a dozen men who'd back me in any deal against Leavitt. So what is there in it for me?"

"Damn' little, if you're askin'," replied Kalispel shortly. "But are you goin' to let Leavitt bluff you?"

"No man ever blufled a Texas Ranger," drawled Masters. "I'm just sore enough to resign, pack, an' get ready to leave with my friends—then call on Leavitt to leave my caird."

"By thunder! I'd like to do that. But I promised Ruth I'd not look Leavitt up."

"Square of you. Thet girl is deservin', Kal."

"Old-timer, this is what I came down to tell you. Leavitt is at the head of this bandit gang, an' he's runnin' it shore slick."

"Emerson, are you sure?"

"Hell, yes!" whispered Kalispel. "I stood under Leavitt's window an' heard him betray himself. He's a common, low-down, two-bit thief, a second-hand murderer, an' a slick-tongued deceiver of women."

"An' don't forget he's a leader of Thunder Mountain's vigilantes! He hasn't been seen downtown since you shot Borden. Nobody knows what's up, an' everybody's figgerin'. But for me you've about cleared it up."

"Ah-huh. You get my hunch. If Leavitt has organized a vigilante committee you can bet your last dollar the men in it are his hold-up gang."

"A damn' slick dodge! We underrated this man Leavitt. An' now, Kal, my advice to you is rustle out of heah hell for leather! I'll trail you up street a ways."

Kalispel did not like the suspense in the Texan's mien and voice. There was something in the wind. The instant Kalispel got outside, he was amazed to find that the street that had been noisy and animated a few minutes before was now silent, empty except at the extreme lower end. There,

strung across from Borden's hall to the Last Chance saloon stood five masked men, armed with rifles.

Kalispel cursed as a fiery current ran along his veins. Vigilantes! He could not see the upper end of the street, because it curved slightly. He decided to cut through the first alley between buildings to make the creek trail. Once back at his cabin, he and Jake could hold off any reasonable number of men.

There were no alleys near. He must go through a store or saloon. Faces appeared in doors across the street.

"Hands up, Emerson!"

The rough, deadly voice, nervous in its timbre, carried threat of instant death. Kalispel had heard that note before. Freezing in his tracks, he elevated his arms high above his head.

"Up they are!" he ejaculated, damning himself for over-confidence.

"Keep 'em thar." Cautious, heavy steps sounded with that voice. "Frisk him, Dan."

Rude hands jerked his guns from his belt. He heard the click of a hammer being raised, then felt the hard prod of a gun barrel against his back.

Kalispel was marched up the street, where, at the end, the five masked vigilantes led the way toward Leavitt's cabin and mill. Judging from the increasing hum and trample in the rear, all of Thunder City was in attendance.

"Halt!" ordered Kalispel's captor, when the procession had approached to within 20 paces of Leavitt's cabin.

"I'm kinda tired holdin' my arms up," complained Kalispel, as he halted, and slowly lowered them.

The five vigilantes in the lead lined up to one side. Kalispel heard the others stop behind. And from far back came the increasing roar of the trailing mob.

"Captain Leavitt," shouted the spokesman, "we have your man!"

The cabin door stood wide open. A table and chairs on the porch had a businesslike look. Presently two miners came out, followed by Leavitt. He was white of face and stern. His flaring gaze leaped upon Kalispel standing motionless in the open square, and then swept over the vigilantes and to the approaching crowd, then back to the prisoner.

"Leavitt, what's the meanin' of this outrage?" demanded Kalispel, his voice carrying far.

"Let the crowd come close enough to hear the proceedings," ordered Leavitt.

The trampling of many feet slowed up behind Kalispel and spread in a half-circle until it was possible for him to see the people on both sides. This swerving of his gaze brought into his line of vision a scaffold newly erected. Kalispel became a man of iron. Leavitt would never hang him.

"That's close enough," called out Leavitt, and then he fixed his eyes upon some man whose slow steps could be heard. "Masters, that applies to you, too."

"Wal, I reckon I'm sheriff of Thunder City," drawled the cool, easy voice of the Texan.

"Yes, and a damn' poor sheriff you are," retorted Leavitt. "Flaunting your friendship for this desperado in the face of the whole town!"

"Leavitt, I back my actions. Thet's why I'm heah. We might disagree as to Emerson's status. An' if this heah deal is a trial, as I reckon it is, you'll want it to stand the test of public opinion."

"Certainly. There's nothing secret about this trial. Emerson is before the vigilantes of Thunder City."

"Wal, in thet case somebody must represent him, an' I'll make thet my last official duty, after which I'll resign."

"Very well. We accept your stand for Emerson and also your resignation."

Masters slowly came into the line of Kalispel's vision. Sight of the cool Texan flooded Kalispel's grim soul with gratitude.

The Texan turned to Kalispel with slow, casual steps. "Am I acceptable to you, Emerson?" he queried.

"Thanks, Masters," returned Kalispel. The Texan's words were negligible compared with the wonderful power and meaning of his gray eyes. Kalispel was swift to read that gaze. Masters's action was merely a ruse to permit him to come forward, gradually to edge near enough for Kalispel to leap and jerk free Masters's two big guns and shoot his way to death or freedom.

"Judge, before you make a charge against the prisoner, may I ask what constitutes yore right to this procedure?" queried Masters deliberately.

"I am captain of these vigilantes," replied Leavitt curtly.

"Wal, thet won't stand before the law. You were not elected. You appointed yoreself."

"But I was elected judge of this mining camp," parried Leavitt with composure. "If you know the laws of gold diggings you will agree that I have absolute authority."

"Wal shore, aboót all claims, arguments, sales an' exchange, an' all thet. But hardly to make arrests an' build scaffolds. That ought to be my job."

"Masters, we won't split hairs over that," declared Leavitt with cold finality. "Emerson is on trial, and I'm his judge."

"Air you puttin' him on trial for gun-play?"

"There is no law on the frontier against even breaks."

"Wal, then, what's Emerson's offense?" demanded the Texan sharply.

Judge Leavitt seated himself at his table and arranged papers before he replied. "Emerson is a bandit."

Masters wheeled toward Kalispel. "You heah thet?" he called.

"I'm not deaf, Masters."

"Wal, what you got to say about it?"

"Leavitt is a damned liar."

Again Masters faced the porch. Kalispel felt like a tiger about to leap. The Texan stood a little to the left, a good long jump distant, and his black guns hung in plain sight, as easy to draw as if they had been on Kalispel himself.

"Judge, I've heahed yore accusation. An' I heahed Emerson's denial. I mean no offense when I say thet his word before the court is as good as yores. You'll have to furnish proof."

"That is, what we propose to do," rejoined Leavitt loudly. "Jones, step forward."

The smaller of the two men who had come out of the cabin with Leavitt strode forward to face the vigilantes.

"State your evidence against this prisoner," ordered Leavitt.

"He robbed me," returned Jones in a resonant, frank voice. "It happened at night, two weeks ago come Wednesday, just after six o'clock. I was comin' from my claim in the dark. Just off one of them deserted tents down the crick a man stepped out behind me an' jabbed a gun in my back. He asked for my dust. I had two bags, one dust an' the other nuggets. I gave them up."

"Did you recognize Emerson?" asked the judge.

"No, thet is, not his person. But I shore did his voice. I'd heard thet often."

Masters turned to take another step in Kalispel's direction. "What you say to thet?"

"Sheriff, it's another rotten lie," called Kalispel piercingly. "An' Jones couldn't look at me with it, unless he knew I'd never get out of this alive."

"Matthews, step forward," ordered the judge, to the second man, who was tall, pale-visaged, and less convincing. "State your case against the prisoner."

"Emerson held me up, Jedge," replied Matthews. "It was last Saturday night, at about half after eight. It was right in town. An' he stepped out of the shadow of Spence's store. He had a scarf over his face, but it slipped down a ways when he was friskin' me. An' I recognized him easy. He took my gold, watch, an' guns."

"Matthews, you say this occurred last Saturday night at half past eight, and that you recognized Emerson perfectly?" queried the judge.

"Yes, sir."

Leavitt waived the witness aside and again attended to the sheriff. "Masters, that seems conclusive to me. There's no doubt in my mind

Emerson is guilty of all these hold-ups, and shootings, too. I'll put it to a vote."

"Never mind havin' yore vigilantes vote yet," returned Masters with sarcasm. "The trial ain't over." He faced around to Kalispel for the third time with unobtrusive step. "Kalispel, you heahed?"

"Yes."

"Wal, it sounded fishy to me," replied the Texan. "An' if you can recall shore jest where you was on Saturday night at half past eight, I'll take yore word for it."

"I was—" began Kalispel readily, when suddenly he remembered that on the hour in question Sydney Blair was alone with him in his cabin.

"Wal, speak up, an' make it plain to this listenin' crowd," said Masters impatiently.

Kalispel let out a hard laugh. It did not make any difference to Leavitt and his vigilantes whether he cleared himself or not. And in another moment he would be leaping for Masters's guns.

"Sorry, old-timer," his voice rang out. "I reckon I can't remember."

"There," flashed Leavitt, his hand extended shaking. "Condemned by his own lips!"

The crowd stirred to restless shifting of feet and sibilant whispers. Then Kalispel was transfixed at sight of Sydney Blair running in to face Leavitt.

"Rand Leavitt," she cried in high tones that pierced to every ear in the multitude, "your tool, Matthews, has not condemned Emerson, but himself as a liar—and *you* as a worse one!"

"*What?*" hissed Leavitt, leaping up, to lean forward with purpling face.

"Kalispel Emerson absolutely could not have robbed Matthews last Saturday night at half past eight," rang Sydney's voice, vibrant with righteous anger.

"And why not?" shouted Leavitt furiously."

"Because he was with me—in his cabin!"

"In his cabin—alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"Sydney Blair! *You?* My promised wife! What—why were you there?"

"I went there to tell him what a villain you are—to tell him I had broken my engagement with you—to beg him to—to forgive me and take me back again!"

The transformation that swift speech wrought in Leavitt was monstrous to behold. The suave gentleman, the confident mining boss, the cold, grim judge went into eclipse. And a malignant, mouthing, passion-ridden devil leaped off the porch.

"Look there, woman!" he shouted, strident with hate, as he pointed with quivering finger at the scaffold. "You'll see your lover hanged!"

This seemed to Kalispel to be the moment for him to leap for Masters's guns, but Sydney stood in the way. There would be other shooting beside his, a wild tumult, pandemonium. He dared not risk harm to her. Masters edged back toward him.

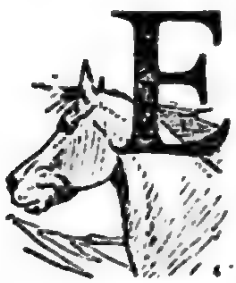
"Men! Seize him," yelled Leavitt. "By God, he hangs!"

The answer was a woman's piercing cry, whether Sydney's or another's Kalispel never knew. And at the same instant the solid ground shook under his feet.

"Hell's fire!" shrieked a vigilante. "The mountain! The mountain! *Run for your lives!"*

Chapter Fifteen

Thunder Mountain, Avenger



EVERY spectator looked. The vast slope was waving like a sea. And on the instant a groaning, straining rumble came from the depths. Far up, a whole bare ridge began to slide.

"Avalanche!"

"A slide—a slide!"

These cries were drowned in the united yell of the crowd. And this was lost in a terrific thunder that came unmistakably from a mountain mass in movement.

Kalispel saw Sydney sway and fall. He leaped to snatch her up in his arms and back away from the awesome spectacle.

The vigilantes were in full flight with the rest of the crowd. Masters passed Kalispel, yelling words that could not be heard. Leavitt had run from the lee of the cabin to look up and see the slow, waving descent of sections of slope, of ridges and mounds. The earth seemed shaken to its core. Thunder that was not thunder filled the air.

Leavitt seemed suddenly bereft of his senses. He dashed a few steps after the crowd only to whirl and dash back. He bounded up on the porch and into the cabin.

What had been rumble and thunder died in a crash as if the earth were rent asunder. A great slide piled down on Leavitt's mill, crushing, shoving, covering the chutes, and at last, as if by magic, obliterating the mill. Out of the thick rolling mass of mud huge balls of dry earth broke to let out puffs of dust.

The mill was gone and with it went the splintering crash. Hoarse shouts of men, sounding far away, pierced Kalispel's ears. He backed against a boulder, still holding the girl. Masters stood by him, holding his arm, shouting. The spectacle fascinated them, and when Leavitt appeared in the door of his cabin, acting like a man bereft of his senses, they were rooted to the spot.

His frenzy, his wringing hands, his voiceless yells were eloquent

of something that was gone! gone! gone! Kalispel understood then that not until this moment of catastrophe had Leavitt known of the loss of his gold.

His pale face vanished from the dark doorway. And that instant, with a rumble and a shake the mass of slope let loose in a landslide to move down upon the cabin. The roof caved in, and earth poured down like water into a vessel.

Leavitt appeared at the door and then was felled by a falling rafter. He went down, his head outside the door. And there, wrenching and lunging, like an animal caught by its hind feet in a trap, he raised his body and flung his arms. In each hand he held a bag of gold. His face was a gray blotch.

The sliding silt filled the cabin and began to pour out of the door over Leavitt. Still he struggled. Like a waterfall the earth rushed off the roof on each side, leaving a slowly closing, fan-shaped aperture through which the doomed man could be seen. Then came a sliding roar, a cloud of dust—and the cabin disappeared.

As if in mockery of the littleness of man, nature pealed out the doom which the wise old beaver and the savage chief had foreseen. No sound before had ever equaled that thundering travail of the mountain yielding its might, its bulk, its stability to the stupendous force of gravitation. For ages its foundation had groaned warnings. And now the hour of collapse had come.

The slope was a billowy sea on end. Far up, the trees were aslant, falling, wagging, piling up and sliding down. The hollows filled, the scant thickets rode the avalanche, the ridges rose like waves and sank in furrows. Majestic and awful, the mile high face of the mountain moved down.

Gradually the movement slowed and as gradually the rumbling thunder diminished. The shouts of men could be heard. Once more the sound of the stream penetrated the valley.

Blair approached Kalispel and Sydney, who had recovered from her faint.

"My God! Kal—isn't it awful?" gasped Blair, taking hold of Sydney.

"Shore came in the nick of time for me," replied Kalispel hoarsely. "Pack an' rustle, Blair."

Masters appeared, approaching the edge of the slide, which had moved out some distance on the bench. He stopped for a while to watch it.

Sydney seized Kalispel's hand. "Look! The place where—I fell—is covered," she whispered with a glance Kalispel would never forget.

Presently Masters held up his hand and bellowed to the watching crowd, "She's movin' three feet

a minute. Thunder City is doomed. Run an' tell everybody. Grab yore gold, some grub, a blanket, an' rustle out of heah!"

Kalispel ran toward his cabin, every few moments halting to look back at the spectacle. It was as great and as strange as had been his deliverance. Every rod that he progressed away from the sliding slope changed its perspective: the farther he got away the more he could see. Three feet a minute! It would not be long until the encroaching landslide must reach the edge of the long, one-streeted town. Miners were running in every direction.

Jake's gloomy visage lightened at sight of Kalispel. "About time you got back!"

"Where's—Ruth?"

"Poor kid, she's scared 'most damn' near to death," replied Jake, indicating that the girl was inside the cabin.

Ruth lay on the couch with her face covered.

"Ruth!" he panted as he sat down beside her and tore her hands and scarf from her face. "I'm here."

She leaped up to clasp him in her arms, and the horror faded from her eyes as she kissed him wildly, unconscious of all save his return.

"Why—kid—don't take on so!" he said huskily.

"I saw the vigilantes march you up to Leavitt," she whispered. "Jake held me back. He swore you'd come through. But, oh, I nearly went mad!"

"Closest shave I—ever had," replied Kalispel, breathing hard. He beckoned for Jake to come in the open door. Then he recounted to them the events of the last hour.

They did not remain longer in the cabin. Outside again, they gazed spellbound at the scene. Shacks and tents were riding upended at the base of the moving mountain, splintering sounds came clearly across the distance; the sinister inexorable landslide crept toward the town.

But if the spectacle low down was fascinating, that high up on the slope was indescribably so. The movement seemed more visible there and it was monstrous. Over the ridge back of the center of the town hove in sight a moving forest that heretofore had been hidden from view. With firs and pines uprooted, upflung, upended, a section of slope slid down with slow and terrible precision. Far at the end of the town, where the valley narrowed in its approach to the canyon, the landslide had made more progress. Borden's huge dance hall stood in line for almost instant annihilation.

"Kal, that landslide will wipe Thunder City out, dam the valley, an' make a lake where we're standin' now," declared Jake. "Wowl hear thet smash! Borden's

dance hall dancin' to its grave! Ain't thet a queer sight? It jest ain't real, folks."

"Jake, rustle to your packin'," ordered Kalispel. "We want to get out ahead of the mob."

"I reckon the exodus won't begin till tomorrow," returned Jake. "Most of these gold hawgs will hang on till the end."

"Ruth, rustle into warm things an' overalls. It'll be tough sleddin' on the pass. But we'll get over before night an' camp below the snow line."

They packed feverishly for a while and then stopped to breathe and gaze again at the phenomenon. The Blairs rode by behind the freighters and a train of pack animals. Far across the stream miners could be seen in droves, moving their effects up on the high bench. Fire broke out in one of the overturned buildings, sending forth flames and volumes of yellow smoke. The grinding of boulders went on, the cracking of walls, the thudding of trees, and the incessant shouting of excited men.

Kalispel selected the best burro to pack the *alforjas* which carried his gold. Over this pack he strapped his bedding. Ruth came out dressed to ride, and when he saw her he did not fear that the picture of Sydney Blair in riding garb would ever haunt him again. By this time Jake had packed the other two burros.

"If you pack my saddle horse, Jake, I'll walk. I reckon that'll take the outfit," said Kalispel.

"Oh, look!" cried Ruth.

A mile of the face of the landslide had crept upon the long line of the buildings on the north side of the main street. Three feet a minute! Yet it might have been a tidal wave, for the crashing and rending, the smashing and rolling, the collapsing and upheaving of tents, shacks, cabins, stores, and saloons, gave the impression of swiftly advancing havoc and ruin. The landslide seemed relentless.

Thunder again! The ground shook beneath Kalispel's feet, and Ruth reached for him with eager hands and parted lips. Rocks heaved out of the moving silt to roll, to be buried again, to appear once more, to slide and gather momentum until they were hurtling down to leap the boulders on the bench and crack as if exploding, or thudding soddenly into the piling earth around the houses. One half the city seemed alive, writhing and crunching in the maw of the avalanche, while the other half waited apprehensively the approach of the cataclysm.

"Ruth, fork your horse," ordered Kalispel, driven to tear his gaze from the spectacle. "Jake, move 'em along. We're late now."

Ruth stepped up and swung into her saddle with a lithe ease and grace which could come only from long practice. Somehow the sight

enhanced her value and suddenly gave her a charm Kalispel had not appreciated till then.

He untied his burro, and with rifle in hand stepped out upon the trail.

At the bend of the stream, where the trail turned, Kalispel had his last close view of Thunder City and the juggernaut which was destroying it. He turned even after he could see no more. But he could still hear the detonations like sodden blows.

Far up the trail a train of pack mules zigzagged toward the summit of the pass. The stream, bank-full, and yellow in hue, roared hurriedly down, as if sensing an hour when no escape from the valley would be possible. And the sun, westering, had begun to gild the white clouds over the western wall.

Kalispel marveled at his deliverance. This vengeance had not been meant for him. A higher power had settled the score with Leavitt.

The trail grew steep and began its zigzag course. Kalispel climbed behind Ruth's horse. She did not talk nor did she look back.

The air grew cold, with a hint of snow in its breath. Jake toiled on, his wide shoulders bowed. The lop-eared burros plodded on behind him. Kalispel never let go of the halter of his burro.

The melodious roar of the stream ceased to thrum in Kalispel's ears. It died away gradually. Sharp, cold wind rustled the sagebrush on the slope.

At last Jake halted on the first level of the pass, where patches of snow spotted the gray. His ruddy face, almost as red as his shirt, turned down toward the valley. His mouth gaped, his jaw dropped, his eyes popped, and he threw up one long arm in a voiceless salutation to something awe-inspiring.

Ruth bowed her head over the neck of her horse and did not turn. Kalispel suddenly understood. Ruth had the strength not to look back. She had forever bidden farewell to that sordid gold camp and to the life she had led there.

But Kalispel gazed back and was stunned. The long valley lay at his feet under slanting rays and veils of golden light, and through its center meandered a shining stream of fire which ended in a broad, shield-shaped, blazing lake.

The farthest end of the landslide had dammed the stream. Houses, half-submerged, like sinking boats, floated upon its surface. Men like ants toiled along its farther shore. Kalispel looked in vain for what had been the long, narrow gray-walled, white-tented town, for the long, wide street with its teeming life.

Chaos reigned down in that valley, transcendantly beautiful in its sunset hues and curtains, terrible with its naked destructive forces of earth and rock.

Kalispel had to gaze over and over again and readjust his perspective to make clear what he really did see. And when Jake and Ruth had gone on up the trail, and the sun sank behind the western wall, Kalispel had painted forever on his memory the grandeur of the slide of Thunder Mountain into the valley. When he finally wrenched himself from the scene, he led his burro up the pass into the snow. As twilight fell Kalispel plodded down into a sheltered grove of aspens where a bright fire blazed and Jake whistled at his tasks. Ruth sat before the fire, her face rosy and sweet, her small bare hands extended to the heat.

"We're over the hill!" said Kalispel, as he gazed down upon his charge, and he meant vastly more than the surmounting of the snowy pass.

The Middle Fork presented Kalispel's next problem. If it was in flood, there would be many miners camping at the ford. Kalispel desired to avoid contacts. The river itself did not worry him. He would wait until the flood subsided or build a raft and ferry his packs over on that.

Trailing downhill was easy on burros and men. The ford of the Middle Fork was reached in the late afternoon of the third day out from the valley. The river was high. Kalispel ordered camp and busied himself constructing a raft.

"What'n hell do we want a raft fer?" snorted Jake.

"Reckon to freight Ruth's fine togs safely across."

"Kal, I burned them!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Aw, wall I'll pack mine over on it, then. Hate to wet my clothes an' bed."

Next morning disclosed his wisdom. Jake had a ducking in the icy water and one of the burros was rolled by the swift current. Kalispel dragged his improvised raft up stream and crossed on it with his *alforjas* without a hitch. Ruth handled her horse like a cowboy.

Chapter Sixteen

"Married People Do Sleep Together"

KALISPEL made noonday halt in a grove of cottonwoods on the bank of the Salmon River below Challis. He wanted to give that congested town a wide berth. But he sent Jake in to fetch back some very necessary supplies, and upon a mission he did not confide to Ruth until his brother was out of sight.

"Say," he began hesitatingly, "Jake is goin' to fetch back the—the parson."

"The—*what!*" flamed Ruth, starting up.

"I sent for the parson," Kalispel replied, after a pause.

"Kal Emerson, you're going to stick to that promise to Dick?"

"I'd forgotten about him, but not about marrying you. I shore intend to do that."

"I won't," she declared.

"You will," he returned.

"Why?" she asked, her face paling.

"Wal, for a number of reasons, most particular of which is that I want to take care of you an' make you happy."

"But you don't have to *marry* me—to do that. I'll be happier than I ever was in my life—just to be with you, work for you."

"Maybe you could. An' that would be all right with me," he rejoined earnestly. "Only, our story will be known. An'—wal, I won't have it any other way."

"I—I thought I'd settled it," she faltered miserably.

"If you cry I'll—I'll spank you," he declared threateningly.

"I'd forgotten everything—and I was happy."

"Ah-huh. An' now you're unhappy just because I'm determined to make you Mrs. Lee Emerson? Gosh! It's shore flatterin' to my vanity."

"Kal, I'm not like other girls—Oh! if you only—*only* had met me—when I was sixteen!" she sobbed.

Kalispel said, "Ruth, it's only for appearance's sake. I told you that. You'll not be my wife, really. So there'll be nothin' for you to be ashamed of. An' I'll have you to take care of—an' you'll have me."

"Very well. I will marry you," she replied faintly.

Kalispel left her alone then and walked under the cottonwoods, realizing that he did not understand himself very well. But he felt greatly relieved and glad of her decision. Presently he heard a clip-clop of hoofs and the crunch of wheels on the gravel road. A light spring wagon turned off toward the cottonwood grove. Kalispel saw that the driver was a minister and that the other occupant of the wagon was Jake.

"Kal, this is Parson Weeks," announced Jake as they came to a stop. "I commissioned him to pack our fresh supplies out. An' he's offered to sell the hoss an' wagon cheap. So I reckon, when he winds up by hitchin' you an' Ruth, thet it'll be a right pert day for him."

"Howdy, Parson. I'm shore glad to meet you," drawled Kalispel, offering his hand, as the gray-haired little man alighted.

"The pleasure is mine, Emerson. I've heard of you and I'm glad to shake this good right hand of yours."

"Come an' meet the lady."

Ruth rose from her log seat as they approached, and Kalispel's fears were allayed. She showed no trace of distress and met them with a smile.

"Ruth, this is Parson Weeks," announced Kalispel.

"Parson, I have promised to marry him," said Ruth presently, with lovely, troubled eyes uplifted. "I will—but I ought not."

"And why not, if you care for him?" exclaimed Weeks kindly.

"Oh, I do love him, but I was a dance-hall girl and I can never live down the bad name that gave me."

"Suppose you were," he replied slowly. "That is nothing if he wants you."

"Yes, I do!" said Kalispel with passion. "Parson, I took her out of a dance hall, but that doesn't say she was bad. An' I'm goin' to marry her an' make her happy. If you can only talk a little sense into her pretty head you'll be doin' me an everlastin' favor."

"Ah! I see!" The minister took Ruth's hand. "My dear child, this is a question of love and love alone. Emerson is proving his. You have told me of yours. I advise you as a father and beseech you as a minister to marry this young man. I am of the West, Ruth. And I know what the foundation has been. Who shall remember in threescore years, when this broad land will be prosperous with cities and ranchers, that the grandmothers of that generation, ever were, let us say, dance-hall girls? And if it were remembered, who could bring calumny against the strong-souled mothers of the West?"

Parson Weeks married Ruth and Kalispel under the gold-leafed cottonwoods, with Jake grinning happily by. And when Kalispel bent over Ruth to watch her sign the marriage certificate, he was rather astonished to discover that he had never before known her surname.

Kalispel bought out Olsen, lock, stock, and barrel, to his own rapture and the dissatisfied rancher's great satisfaction.

A belated Indian summer fell upon the Salmon River Valley and added its enchantment of smoky, still, golden days to the splendor of silver, black-tipped

slopes, and the singing river.

While Jake scoured the Lemhi Valley for horses and cattle, Kalispel superintended the erection of a spacious addition to Olsen's log cabin. Carpenters and builders from the town peeled the lodgepole pines that the Indians snaked down from the forests, and sawed and raised and hammered till a long living-room arose, with a large open fireplace in the center, and small, well-lighted rooms at each end.

Kalispel never left the ranch, but his orders were sent out, and wagonloads of furniture arrived. And when he had exhausted Salmon's resources he sent freighters to Boise for the luxuries he wanted for Ruth. Pictures, curtains, lamps, rugs, linen, all the things he had surreptitiously learned from Ruth were dear to the hearts of housewives, all these and many more came almost before the roof was on, to Ruth's growing consternation and rapture.

"Oh, Kal! If you are going in debt we are ruined before we start!" she wailed.

"Nary a debt," he replied with a mysterious air.

"Kal, you struck gold over there —struck it rich—and kept it secret!"

"Wal, there's somethin in what you say," he replied lazily.

Kalispel planned many surprises, to Ruth's endless bewilderment. When Smoky arrived, the prettiest little saddle horse in the valley, with a Mexican silver-mounted saddle and bridle, Ruth followed Kalispel around with eyes that made a slow, strange heat throb in his veins.

However, when a young Lemhi Indian couple put in an appearance, the stalwart man to help Jake with his tasks, and the comely squaw to look after the house, then Ruth arose like a roused lioness. To her wrath and her protestations and lamentations Kalispel turned a flinty if not a deaf ear.

"Dog-gone it! There's too much work on this big place for a little girl like you!" he ejaculated finally. "I won't have my wife makin' a slave of herself. Not while I'm rich."

"Rich! Damn you, Kal!— Oh, forgive me. I meant to stop swearing. But I don't care if you *are* rich, you mysterious cowpuncher! I want to be worth my salt. Let me cook and bake and sew for you!"

"Wal, I sort of think I'll like that, a little," he drawled. "But not pitchin' hay or diggin' potatoes or milkin' cows or choppin' wood or scrubbin' floors, or any of a hundred jobs such as Olsen's wife had to do. You savvy, Mrs. Emerson?"

"Yes, I savvy," she replied, her eyes shining through tears.

By mid-November the leaves were off the cottonwoods and willows; the grass had grown sear and

brown; the skies were mostly gray; and the wailing wind and dismal croak of ravens from the hill attested to the imminent approach of winter.

Jake had driven in 1000 head of cattle and 50 horses, which were turned out in the river pastures. The freighting was all finished. Jake and the Indian cut firewood when the other farm chores left them time.

During these eventful and all-satisfying weeks Kalispel heard endless gossip from Jake, who never failed to return from town with the latest happenings. Moreover, miners and travelers, who often stopped at the ranch, brought their share of news. Only of late had the stream of miners from Thunder City diminished to a few stragglers.

Five hundred gold diggers had remained behind to spend the winter in the ruined gold camp. Thunder Mountain had slipped down to pile a dam 100 feet high across the valley at the lower end. A hundred feet of water now covered the long, wide street where revelry had held sway day and night. But the gold was still there. And in the spring the 100-ton stamp mill would be packed in.

Of vital interest to Kalispel was the news that Masters had lingered at Thunder City long after all his friends had left. And one day, in a tent-walled gambling den, he had clashed with two miners named Jones and Matthews and had killed them both. One of these men, while dying, had confessed to the murder of Sam Emerson, at Leavitt's instigation.

Kalispel often inquired about Blair and his daughter, but they seemed to have vanished. Memory of the dark-haired, violet-eyed girl had mellowed, and he no longer felt any regret or remorse.

Then one day a leaden sky mantled the mountain peaks and snow began to fall. Great, feathery, white flakes floated down to cover the slopes, the ranges, the cabins, the sheds and fences, all except the dark green, gliding river. Three feet of snow fell during that first storm of the winter, and when it cleared the mercury slipped down below zero.

Kalispel gazed out of the window that morning upon a beautiful white world.

"Gosh, how I always used to hate winter!" he ejaculated. "Blizzards on the Wyomin' range were no joke."

"I love winter," replied Ruth gayly.

"Snowed in, like a couple of Missouri groundhogs! Snowed in for the winter, you an' me, Ruth! Aw, it's terrible hard luck for Kalispel Emerson! Nice, cozy, bright livin'-room, big open fireplace an' stacks an' stacks of dead wood to burn! Shore is hard luck for a down-trodden, never-under-

stood cowboy!"

"Yes, I had observed the same thing," replied Ruth, with an expressive glance from her blue eyes.

"Shore. I'm glad you are observin'," drawled Kalispel, the mood growing on him. "An' stuff to eat! Two deer hangin' up in the shed an' a thousand pounds of elk meat! Milk an' cream an' butter all I can stuff, an' not have to lift a darn' hand to get it. An' then this here livin'-room Books galore! Nice, bright lamps an' easy chairs! Aw, the long winter evenin's when the wind moans an' the snow blows, with all these things—an' a girl no man would ever tire lookin' at!"

"Oh, so you have observed that last!" exclaimed Ruth lightly.

Kalispel looked at her. "November, December, January, February, March, April, May!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, the long months, eh?" she rejoined encouragingly.

"Yep, the long months with you alone."

"Kal, isn't that prospect very—very—?"

"Shore it is," he agreed.

That night he was unusually quiet and not responsive to Ruth's thoughtful importunities. But when bedtime came he apparently regained his cheerfulness. "Dog-gone! Ruth, can't you feel the cold creepin' in?" he said, as he got up to bank the red bed of embers in the fireplace. "If I don't keep pilin' on wood—"

"It was fifteen degrees below zero this morning," she declared.

"Wal, no wonder. Do you sleep warm, Ruth?" he asked solicitously, as he turned his back, raking up the coals.

"I freeze to death," she rejoined frankly, with a laugh.

"So do I, towards mornin'," he drawled thoughtfully. "Dog-gone it, Ruth, suppose we sleep together to keep warm."

She uttered a slight gasp, but did not reply. Kalispel went on piling the ashes over the live fire and taking pains about it.

"Course I won't sleep in my chaps an' spurs, as I used to," he ventured.

"Kal!" she whispered faintly. "You—you're not—in earnest?"

"Shore, come to think of it. You see I just happened to think that married people do sleep together in winter-time. So I've been told. It's not a bad idee, Ruth."

Another long silence, which at length she broke in a strangled voice. "Very well. I—I will."

Then he let out a great exultant laugh. In one long stride he reached her, and lifting her out of her chair, he kissed eyes and cheeks and then her lips. After which he sat down in her chair and held her close and tight to his breast.

Outside, the night wind complained under the eaves; the branches of the cottonwood rus-

tled on the roof; the river roared its melancholy song; and a wolf mourned his lonely and hungry state—all of which sounds were of Kalispel's past, reminders of the solitude and the wild, now gone with the hard days that were no more. THE END

GREAT LAWMEN OF THE WEST

A Quiz

THE ANNALS of the West offer many thrilling accounts of the men who brought the law to the frontier. Ten of them are listed in the right-hand column below. See if you can match the names correctly with the brief descriptions in the left-hand column, then turn to page 170 to check your answers. A score of 6 right is passing; 7, fair; 8, good; 9, better; and 10 is so good it's not only best—it's perfect.

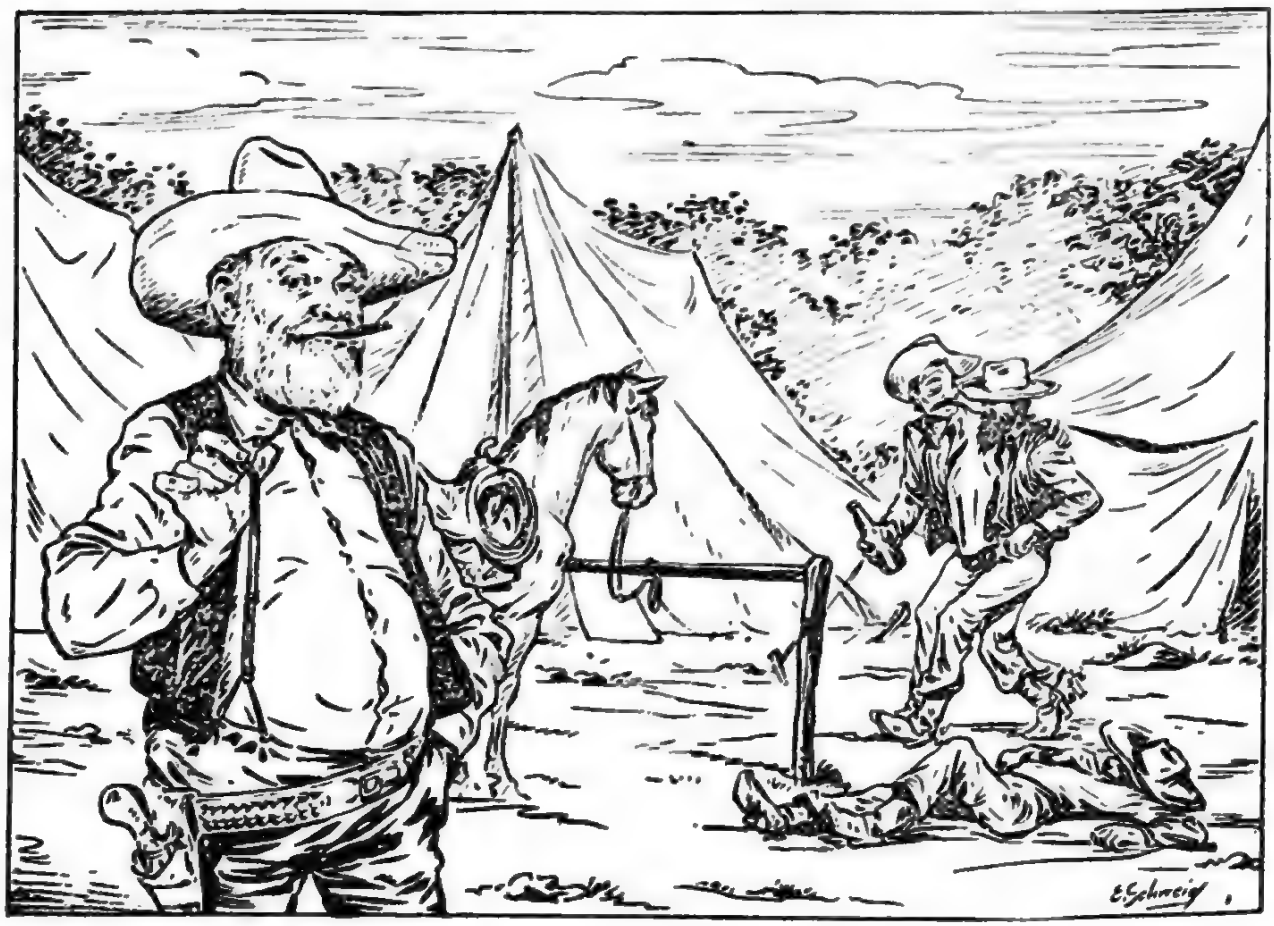
1. He trapped and killed Billy the Kid. —John Slaughter
2. Armed with bowie knife, sawed-off shotgun, and six-shooters, he patrolled the streets of Abilene. —Dallas Stoudenmire
3. Aided by his brothers and Doc Holliday, he bested the Clantons and McLowerys in a memorable Tombstone gun-fight. —Billy Breakinridge
4. Former Confederate soldier and ex-Ranger, he became the two-gun marshal of El Paso. —Pat Garrett
5. At 22 sheriff of Ford County, Kansas; later a U. S. marshal in New York. —Wyatt Earp
6. Tombstone respected this deputy sheriff for his quiet courage, fair dealing —Wild Bill Hickok
7. Cattle king who became the sheriff of Cochise County, Arizona. —John R. Hughes
8. Noted for an outstanding, 50-year career as marshal in Dodge City and in Oklahoma. —Bat Masterson
9. College graduate, lover of books, reckless gambler, and Arizona sheriff. —Bill Tilghman
10. Outstanding Texas Ranger for 28 years, 21 of them as Captain. —Bucky O'Neill

Law West of the Pecos

The Saga of Roy Bean

Story by DALE ROBERTSON *Pictures by* ERVIN SCHWEIG

THE FIGURE of Roy Bean stands out in bold relief on the pages of our frontier history. This swashbuckling old fellow, the first representative of organized law in the region west of the Pecos, has been the center of almost as many tales and legends as the mythical Paul Bunyan. This picture-story, presenting some of the high spots of his career, is based on the book, Roy Bean, Law West of the Pecos, *by C. L. Sonnichsen (Macmillan) an amusing volume which contains many stories about Roy Bean.*



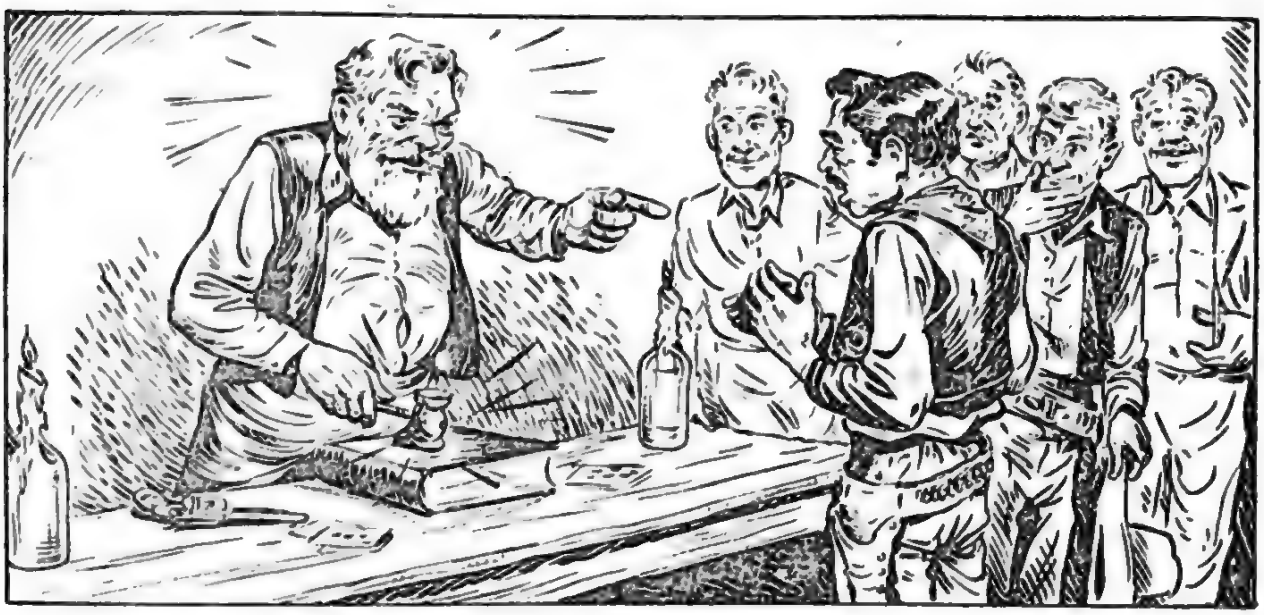
When Roy Bean became the first justice of the peace west of the Pecos, that region was swarming with rustlers, gunmen, and hard-case characters. Before long the fabulous old frontier tyrant was announcing dryly, "Everything is perfectly peaceful here—why, there hasn't been a man killed in four hours."

Seated behind the table which was used for the monte layout in Roy's tent-saloon at the town of Vinegaroon, Judge Bean dispensed rough-and-ready justice. If a trial was long and thirst-provoking, frequent recesses allowed judge, jury, and accused to refresh themselves with Proprietor Bean's liquor.

When the town of Vinegaroon folded up in 1882, Roy moved to Strawbridge. His career there was a brief one, for a business competitor sneaked some kerosene into Roy's whisky barrel, and his trade melted away. Disgusted, Roy packed up and left. Soon thereafter he settled in Eagle's Nest.

In Eagle's Nest Roy ran up against a man named Torres, a saloon proprietor who owned most of the property in the town. Unable to buy or rent a suitable site, Roy squatted on the railroad's right of way and started his own saloon. It was not long before he showed Torres his mettle.

He threatened to shoot Torres on sight for saying that Roy was envious of Torres' prosperous business. No gunman, Roy was probably bluffing, but the Mexican swallowed his words. Torres was later arrested on an assault charge and tried in Roy's court. The jury was very thirsty when the trial ended.



The jury returned a verdict of guilty, recommending a fine of 24 bottles of beer. Torres, who was delighted, invited them over to his saloon. "No you don't!" shouted Judge Bean. "All fines imposed by this here court are paid on the spot!" So the jury drank Roy's beer—at Torres' expense.

Roy called his saloon the *Jersey Lily* in honor of the famous English actress, Lily Langtry. Soon Eagle's Nest itself was renamed "Langtry"—undoubtedly at Roy's insistence. Only occasionally did he lose influence, as once when he lost the justiceship in an election he had considered in the bag.

He was not out of power long. "I'm the only man could make anything out of that office," Roy said later. The new justice soon tired of his job and offered to sell out. Roy, always a tough bargainer, swapped him two bearskins, a demijohn of whisky, and a pet coon for his commission.

Roy's relations with his Mexican constituents were those of a benevolent tyrant. Once, after divorcing two couples, he married each of the women to the other's former husband. Afterward Roy, a little worried, asked a lawyer if it was legal. "Well, you did it, didn't you?" was the answer. "It'll have to be legal!"

The District Judge sought out Roy and remonstrated with him, warning him he had no authority to grant divorces. "Well, I married 'em," Roy said, "and I got a right to unmarry 'em if it didn't take. I figure I was just rectifyin' an error and a man's got a right to do that."

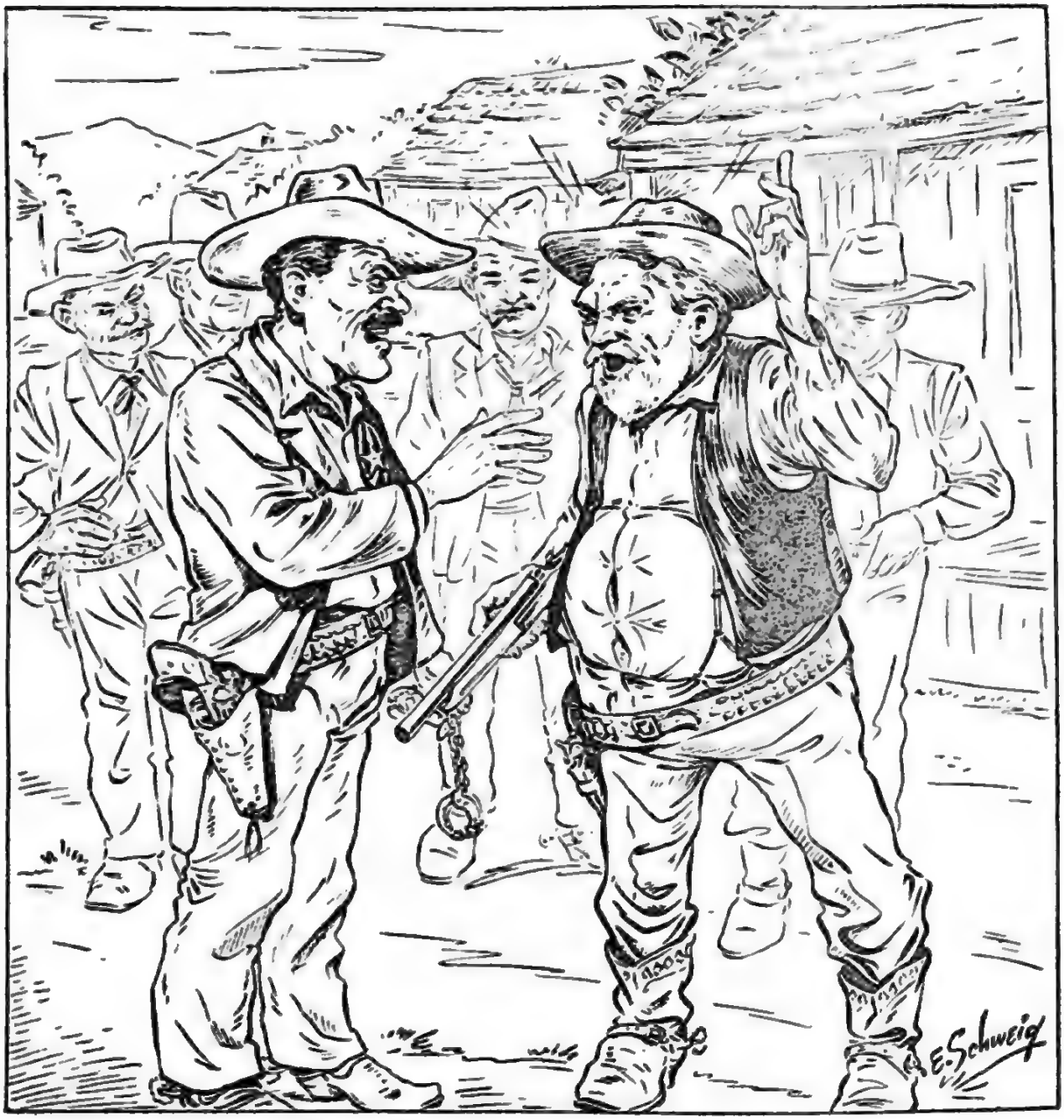
Roy went right along "rectifying his errors." One evening the lady at whose table he boarded remarked that Roy looked tired. "Well, I am tired," he confessed. "I divorced two couples today and swapped 'em around; then I had to spend all afternoon dividin' up the children."

Roy often performed the functions of coroner. Once he conducted an inquest on the body of a stranger. Searching the corpse for identification, Roy found $40 and a gun. "I'll have to bury this poor devil," he said, "and the digging's hard—so I fine this defendant $40 for carrying concealed weapons."

Roy was always pretty high-handed with strangers. An Easterner once annoyed him by paying for a 35-cent drink with a $20 gold piece, so Roy kept the change. When the fellow objected, with considerable profanity, Roy majestically fined him $19.65 for disturbing the peace.

When a freight train was derailed and wrecked near Langtry, several carloads of beet sugar were spilled. Roy went into action, collecting a good many wagonloads of the sugar, which he sold to his Mexican customers for the next few years. Roy never missed a chance to turn a profit if he could help it.

At one time his old enemy, Torres, lured most of Roy's customers away by importing dance-hall girls and an orchestra. Roy's counter-move was to arrest Torres for conducting a "disorderly house," and the *Jersey Lily's* beer sales, which had dropped alarmingly, were soon back to normal.



In 1898 Torres ran against Roy for the justiceship. Furious, Roy took his stand before the schoolhouse that served as the polling-place and kept Torres' supporters away by threats and insults until the sheriff arrived and forced him to stop. Torres won the election. However, Roy won two years later, and in 1902 was re-elected unopposed. He remained the Law West of the Pecos until his death in 1903. Since then stories about this American folk-hero have accumulated until Roy Bean's name has become known to millions of people.

The Branded Man

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

THE SUPPLY TRAIN *destined for the relief of General Johnston's forces is in danger from a surprising source—Hogan, its boss of teamsters. Rod Knight, plains outcast, knows it, and puts up a valiant but apparently hopeless fight to save it—not least because Amy, the general's pretty niece, is the train's lone passenger. This story of hardship, intrigue, and stark violence on the trail has not been published before.*

KETCH up!"

"All's set!"

"Stretch out!"

Another day had dawned over the Trail. In four columns the 28 wagons of the supply train, each with its eight-ox team, took up the westward march. Beside them walked the teamsters, their "Hep! Hep!", the crack of the bullwhips, and the creak of wheels snapping through the silence.

Rod Knight rode beside his section of the wagons. He had a column in his charge, with seven teamsters under him. He was a stockily built man in his middle 30's, dark-haired, with a square

brown beard, and gray eyes that sometimes turned from the wagons to scan the snow-bound plains.

He took no part in the noisy shouting of his men, but rode on, up and down the line. He slowed his horse as one of the teamsters slashed viciously at a straining beast. "Lay off, Keegan!"

Keegan, built like an ox himself, turned with a snarl. Rod reined in, and sat silently watching him for a moment. Then Keegan turned back to his team, and Rod gathered up his reins and rode by. Keegan let his wagon pass him, and waited till the driver of the next one came up to him. He jerked his thumb in Rod's direction. "Gittin' too big fer his boots," he said.

"Wal, he won't be with us much longer," grinned the other. "Hogan sounded him out yistiddy. He's got the ace of spades sign on him."

It was Keegan's turn to grin. "Yeh, soon as we reach the Laramie fork."

Lieut. Frank Hubbard, of West Point, who was in nominal command of the train, rode to the side of the last wagon on the south side of the columns. He stopped the teamster with a gesture, and put his head inside the hoop of the canvas.

"Feeling better, Amy?"

The girl who looked out was in her early 20's, fair-haired, dressed in a city outfit that seemed incongruous on the plains. Her face was pretty in a petulant way. "I wish Uncle Albert hadn't allowed me to come on this dreadful trip," she complained. "I was a fool to leave Washington for this. He ought to have stopped me."

"He tried to, Amy."

"Well, he didn't try hard enough. I thought it would be such an adventure going out to Deseret, and seeing that city the Mormons have built at Salt Lake. Now Hogan says that Uncle Albert and his troops are blocked by the snows, and can't get through the passes until next spring, and the Mormons have surrounded them. And he says unless this train gets through all our troops will starve to death."

"I've heard that story. But you hear wild stories on the Oregon Trail. General Johnston knows his business—a veteran of the Mexican War's not going to be set back by a handful of Mormons. And I don't like your talking to this man Hogan. I don't like the looks of him."

There was a great contrast between young Hubbard and Hogan, the working captain of the wagon-train. Hubbard, youthful and effeminate, for all his West Point dash, looked altogether out of place on the plains. Hogan, built like a gorilla, was the type of burly ruffian who rose to his position by virtue of his ready fists.

Now he pulled in his mule and leered at Amy through his stubble of beard. "How yuh feelin', Miss Lanning?" he asked.

"I'll be all right when this awful journey is over. How much longer will it take?"

"Wal, we're nearin' Laramie. More 'n halfway—much more. Laramie's whar the south fork runs down to Santy Fe. Onct past that, we're nearin' the mountains. Snowfall's light enough fer us to git through to yore uncle. Only thing to worry about is them Mormons."

"But they're in Deseret, the other side of the mountains," protested Amy Lanning.

"Mebbe yuh ain't heerd— You jest stop worryin', Miss Lanning, and we'll hev yuh safe at General Johnston's headquarters in no time."

"But I've got to know what you mean. What haven't I heard?"

"Wal, they're sayin' as how Brig Young has bruk through the General's army and got back to Nauvoo, Illinois, and how he's raised a new army, and is comin' on close behind us, aimin' to clean up all the trains and attack the General from the rear. Shucks, I don't take no stock in it!"

Amy stared at Hubbard after Hogan had ridden on. "Did—did you know about this, Frank?"

"I've heard all sorts of rumors, but I don't pay any attention to them, Amy. I've got a man-size job on my hands, without—"

"You've got a man-size job? Why, you just ride around on your horse, and take your orders from that Hogan."

Hubbard reddened. "It's not my place to do the menial work, Amy. I don't see why you're always picking on me nowadays. Before we started, you thought you cared for me enough to—well, if that's how you feel, I'll leave you to the society of Hogan and that other ruffian, Knight."

"Frank, you know how nervous I get, being cooped up here all day, unless I care to ride and be subjected to the stares of those coarse men. Try to be nicer to me."

"Well, I saw you talking to Knight yesterday, and I didn't like it."

"But what am I to do, if he's polite enough to say good morning to me?"

"Well, Amy, you're learning a lot of unpleasant facts today, and I suppose I may as well tell you who Knight is. Everybody else in this wagon train knows it. He killed his wife in Independence—seems to me that's reason enough for you to be careful about getting mixed up with this teamster scum."

Rod Knight had worked with the trains along the trails, saved enough to start a venture of his own, and settled down in Inde-

pendence, Missouri, where he opened a store. He brought with him a wife, the daughter of a trader and a Mexican woman. He had been deeply in love with her, and crazy-mad enough, when confronted with indisputable evidence of her infidelity, to put a bullet through her heart.

That had been two years before. Public opinion in Independence had stood staunchly by him; nevertheless, Rod sold his store, and traveled the plains, working his way up and down the trails as teamster.

The present outfit had assembled at Council Grove, and Rod had known from the first that there was something crooked about it. Most of the men had been picked by big Hogan, who had easily established his influence over Hubbard, detailed to bring the much-needed supplies to General Johnston. Rod knew Hogan was wanted in New Mexico, and that at least half his men were unsavory characters. He surmised that Hogan had offered him his job as commander of a section in order to have him where he could watch him.

It was beyond the Platte that Hogan came to Rod one night. "This yer army stuff would sell mighty well down in Taos and Santy Fe," he said. "Easy to run the train down the Laramie fork, instead of strugglin' through them mountains."

Rod remained silent, and Hogan watched him keenly. "Of course, I was only supposin'," he went on. "I was supposin' them Mormons was to attack us—that crowd Brig Young has been assemblin' back East. Lordy, what chanct would we hev against all that savage crowd? Me, I'd ruther be settin' purty in Taos than layin' out on the snow with a dozen slugs through my body. And what use would all this cargo be to General Johnston, ef it fell into Brig Young's hands?"

Rod shrugged his shoulders, and Hogan hastened to add, "'Course, I was only supposin', Knight. I'm relyin' on you and Keegan, and a few of the rest, to run the train through to the General, Mormons or no Mormons."

After that, Rod slept with his eyes open and his ears cocked. Still, he guessed no attempt would be made by Hogan and his men until they reached the Laramie fork.

His greatcoat up to his ears, Rod rode slowly along the line, while the oxen stumbled and the teamsters cursed and thumped their arms across their chests. As he passed the last wagon, he heard a call from within it. Amy Lanning was seated in the entrance, wrapped up in her furs. He rode up, keeping his horse close to the wheel.

Amy said, "What's this about the Mormons following us?"

Rod looked at her sullenly. "I wouldn't listen to those tales," he said.

Rod heard Hogan's voice behind him: "Yuh ain't bein' paid fer shinin' with the ladies, Knight. Git on with yore business!"

For a moment the two men faced each other. Then, just as Keegan had done with him, Rod turned away from Hogan—there was still discipline in the wagon train.

Glancing back, Rod saw Hogan riding slowly beside the wagon. He was engaged in talk with Amy, and she was leaning forward and responding eagerly.

In common with all the teamsters, Rod was excited by the presence of this solitary woman in the wagon train, and felt drawn toward her blond beauty. He wasn't quite sure yet what Hogan was planning; he'd know at Laramie, and then maybe something would break loose in him. . . .

Hogan awoke him two hours before the dawn. "Knight, I want you and some of the other fellers I kin trust to git yore hawsses at once. Them Mormons is on our trail. Git ready quiet, and slip outer camp, so as not to skeer Miss Lanning. I'll meet yuh behint that ridge."

Assembled there in a few minutes were some 20 of the tougher members of the outfit. Hogan addressed Rod principally, as if the others already knew:

"It's Brig Young with his crowd. Must be nigh on fifty of 'em. They been trailin' us, and yestiddy I sent one of the cavvy fellers back to scout. He reported to me an hour ago they're comin'. Aimin' to s'prise the train We're layin' up hyar along the bank, and soon as they come into view, we start shootin'."

They tied their horses to the low, dry scrub that fringed the stream beneath the banks, lay down and waited. Day dawned in the east, amid a flurry of snow that swept the whole desolate landscape. They waited, shivering. Hogan passed flasks of brandy along—something always forbidden on the trail. Rod didn't drink; he hadn't touched a drop since that night when he had been blind drunk and killed the woman he had loved.

The sun was up when suddenly, through the curtain of falling snow, black spots appeared far out across the plain.

They resolved themselves into a body of riders, some 25 or 30, riding in an irregular mass toward the encampment. They failed to fan out or take any precautions. A hundred yards away—then 50, and Hogan gave the signal.

Twenty rifles cracked, including Rod's. In an instant the ground was strewn with bodies writhing in the snow and riderless horses were careening back

from the scene of slaughter. The few survivors set spurs to their steeds and bolted.

With savage yells the teamsters left their ambush and ran forward. Flinging themselves upon the prostrate men, they completed their work with their bowies.

When at last it was over and the teamsters drew back, Hogan bellowed, "Yuh done good work, fellers! I reckon we kin go on to relieve General Johnston now, without worryin' about Brig Young and his followers. What's the matter, Knight? Yuh don't seem happy. Ain't yuh never seen dead meat before?"

"Yeh, but I never saw white men fight Injun-style before, onless they'd got more cause to be killin' mad than yore fellers had. Leastways, I'd hev spared some of them to find out how many more Young has."

"Trouble is, yo're too big fer your boots, Knight," said Hogan. "I ain't never murdered no woman yet—least of all my wife."

There was a roar of approbation. Rod's hands clenched. He glanced about him, and realized it wouldn't be just a fight between him and Hogan. He turned away, and heard the laugh go up. He had humbled himself before Hogan, and any vestige of authority that he had had was gone. But the face of Amy Lanning shone through the somber curtain of his thoughts. He'd have to try to help her—save her, if his suspicions of Hogan's intentions were correct.

It was night again, and after a hard day of travel, they were camped. Rod made his way to Amy's wagon. He was within a short distance of it when he heard her voice ring out:

"I tell you you should have stopped it, Frank! All through the journey you've done what Hogan told you to. What's the use of telling me you love me, and talking big, when you're not half a man?"

"I'm tired of your tantrums!" Hubbard burst out. "Make up to that Knight fellow, then, if you think he's the only gentleman in the crowd!"

Rod stepped behind the wagon just as Hubbard dashed away to his own tent on the other side of it. Rod moved forward.

Amy Lanning heard Rod's slight movement, and turned her head. "Mr. Knight!"

Rod went up to her. Her hand met his.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "All this fighting this morning, and the killing—Hogan told me they'd ambushed some of the Mormons, and that otherwise they'd have killed us all. And Frank Hubbard's not the man I can trust to protect me. What shall I do?"

"I'll purtect you, Ma'am," said Rod.

"I'm afraid of Hogan—the way he looks at me," Amy faltered. She was drawing him to her insensibly.

Suddenly his arms were about her. "I'll take yuh away," he whispered.

"When?"

"Tonight, in about an hour. Slip out of the wagon and meet me at the cavvy—I'll attend to the guards thar. I'll hev two hawsses and some food. I'll take yuh along the trail to Fort Fetterman—that ain't so fur, and it's on the way to yore uncle, the General."

"Oh, how can I leave everything and go off like that? Lieutenant Hubbard is supposed to have the care of me—"

"Decision's hard," said Rod, "but it's got to be made."

"I can't—I can't. Go away now, before Hogan finds you here."

"Thar ain't no other chance nor time," said Rod. "It's now or never."

"It's never, then. I—I'd be afraid."

"We got to git on today," said Hogan, speaking as casually as if their quarrel of the day before had never happened. "We're campin' at the Laramie fork."

All through the night Rod had lain awake, trying to make plans. He hadn't dared say more to Amy because he wasn't quite sure as to Hogan's intentions, but he sensed that the situation would be desperate as soon as they reached Laramie.

None of the half dozen men who were not among Hogan's crowd could be relied on. If Hogan meant to run the train off along the Santa Fe Trail, he couldn't be stopped.

All through the night, memory had ridden him hard. The woman had betrayed him; he had been justified in shooting her, by the frontier code; and yet he could see himself, pistol steady in his hand—and the look of terror that veiled her eyes the moment before her death.

Now he was infatuated with Amy Lanning. With her he could forget the past, start life afresh, he thought.

Dawn came with a fresh snowfall through which the oxen slowly plodded, urged on by bullwhips. Rod guessed that, now they were approaching Laramie, they were all keyed up to fever point. Keegan flogged his beasts mercilessly, sneering as Rod rode past.

Toward sunset the little post came into sight, high on the plains, with the distant mountains curving away on three sides of it. Hogan stopped the wagons.

"Campin' hyar," he said to Rod. "Wal, we're four days ahead of time. I reckon General Johnston will be pleased when he sees us." He grinned sardonically and rode on.

Rod threw himself down under

his blankets. He hadn't joined the teamsters since leaving Independence. It was too late now to help Amy. Rod guessed that Hogan would have the camp well guarded. Maybe he would strike this night, or wait until they reached the fork, three miles away, on the morrow.

He must have dozed, despite himself. He was awakened by a woman's scream, and in an instant was on his feet, blinking into the dawn. Amy Lanning was clutching at him, and behind her was Hogan.

Simultaneously the camp leaped into an unroar, punctuated by pistol shots. A man came stumbling past, and Rod recognized him as one of the few who were not members of Hogan's gang. Blood was streaming from his face. A shot pitched him forward, his arms outflung.

Hogan turned, leaped, and swung a teamster around on his heels. "Yuh damn fool!" he shouted. "Didn't I tell yuh thar wuz to be no killin' till we're off on the Santy Fe Trail?" His mighty fist knocked the man senseless.

Amy clung to Rod. "Help me! Save me!" she whimpered.

Rod could hear Hubbard shouting protests, but the sound of them was drowned in the yelling. Amy started screaming hysterically.

Hogan came up to them. "Yuh had yore chanct to come in with us, Knight."

Rod detached the sobbing girl, and waited for the circle of teamsters to close in about them. "Hogan, yuh ain't got the guts to fight me, man to man, to see which of us is goin' to take charge of this yere train."

Hogan was taken aback. The challenge was one that could not be ignored, according to the customs of the Trail. To refuse would be to brand himself a coward, to lose all influence among the men. Hogan looked down at his huge fists.

Rod cried, "You men! Some of you're wanted in diff'rent states, and some ain't, but thar's one crime's worse than any you've committed, and that's makin' war on Uncle Sam—which yuh'll be doin' onless you git this train through to General Johnston. And yuh'll be outlaws fer the rest of yore lives onless yuh do—till Uncle Sam ketches up with yuh. I'm givin' yuh time to consider—and I'm challengin' Hogan to fight to see who's goin' to boss this train."

The teamsters stirred uneasily.

Hogan yelled, "Quit yore palaverin'. I'm ready fer yuh, Knight, and the best man takes command."

A wide circle formed. Amy, terrified, was watching from the ring. Rod saw Hubbard, his cap awry and blood on his face, being held by two of the teamsters. Then

Hogan came at him.

Rod was huskily built, but he saw he would be no match for Hogan in a hammer and tongs fight. He tried to sidestep the terrific swing that the other aimed at him. He was not quite quick enough. It landed on his kidneys, and sent him spinning head over heels into the midst of the spectators, who roared their approval.

Hogan rushed, but not quickly enough to prevent Rod from getting on his feet and facing him again. As Hogan came in, swinging wildly, he ran in under his guard and delivered a left and right to his face that sounded like ax-strokes. Roaring and spitting out teeth, Hogan tried to counter, but Rod dodged his swing and danced defiantly in front of him.

With lowered head, Hogan tried to butt his way forward. Rod waited, crouched. *Smack, smack!* Two vicious uppercuts sent Hogan stumbling blindly, gorilla-like, touching knuckles to the snow to keep himself from falling.

The spectators were going wild —no man had ever stood up to Hogan like that, with the prospect of winning. But their yells were still for Hogan.

Rod grew a shade too confident. As Hogan came on, he connected with his face again, but failed to stop him. Now Hogan had Rod about the body, his huge hands gripping him. One shifted up to his face.

"Gouge him, Hogan!" screamed a bystander.

The claw in front of Rod's eye looked like the broken edge of a steel chisel. Rod jerked his head back; simultaneously his knee came up violently enough to make the other loose his hold and sway from side to side, sickened.

Then Rod broke free, hammering in rights and lefts with Hogan powerless to retaliate. The great hulk reeled, went down. He lay at Rod's feet, his features twitching, his arms weakly flailing the air.

Rod heard Amy scream behind him. He whirled, a shade too late. A stunning blow on the head sprawled him senseless on the snow.

He had lain for a long time in alternation between coma and a faint awareness of his existence. Suddenly a violent twist flung him upon his side, and consciousness came flooding back.

He was lying huddled up in the space between the wagons, which were drawn up for the night in a large square. Fires were burning, and the teamsters were gathered about him and two other captives lying near by.

Hogan came toward him. He grinned as he kicked Rod. "Git up!"

Rod strove to obey, staggered, stumbled, groped for support, and dropped. Now he could see that

the two others were Lieutenant Hubbard and Amy Lanning, gagged and bound—and he saw the bodies of some half dozen members of the outfit piled up in one corner of the enclosure.

Hogan followed his glance. "We're taking them along on the Santy Fe Trail. Not aimin' to leave them whar them Mormons killed them, in case thar might be an inquiry.

"Yuh whupped me, Knight, and yuh'd hev had my life ef Keegan hyar hadn't seen fit to interfere. But yuh whupped me, Knight, and so I'm turnin' over the train to yuh. Thar's only one leetle thing comes fust—yuh need a good rest before assumin' yore new duties. Take the gags outer their mouths," he added to one of the teamsters.

Amy began screaming, but Hubbard lay looking on in silence.

"Yo're takin' charge of these two members of the outfit, Knight. Yuh'll take a rest, and then ketch up with us when yo're ready, and I'll hand over the command. Git the oxen yoked up, fellers. We're startin' on a night trip at sundown."

"You'll pay for this, you murderer!" shouted Hubbard.

"Hard words," grinned Hogan.

The oxen were harnessed. In the late twilight the preparations were completed. Rod recalled a confused impression of having journeyed during his period of unconsciousness; he guessed Hogan was on the Santa Fe Trail, and proposed to put as much distance as possible between himself and any pursuit.

Amy Lanning whimpered, "He told me he'd take me with him if I'd—if I'd— I said I'd rather die. He's going to leave us to freeze to death in the snow."

Hubbard lay silent. Rod was beginning to feel the strength coming back into him.

The full moon was coming up out of the east.

"Stretch out!" came the teamsters' cries. Slowly the wagons got on the move.

Only Hogan and two of his aides remained behind. Hogan said, "Git their shoes off, and socks, and this yere lady's stockings. I'm teachin' yuh to larn to walk delicate, when yuh ketch up with the train."

With a shout of fury Rod got upon his feet. He was knocked down; his shoes and the two pairs of socks he wore were torn from his feet. Amy wept as her shoes and stockings were removed by Hogan's leering aides. Her bonds and Hubbard's were slashed, and they were jerked to their feet.

Amy cried, "Take me with you —I'll do anything you say."

Hubbard said, "See here, Hogan, I'll agree to anything in reason—"

Hogan sent him sprawling. "Now mush, yuh ——s!" he bel-

lowed. He leaped on his horse and galloped away, accompanied by his two companions.

Rod, Hubbard, and Amy stood in the newly fallen snow. The crust of ice forming on it cut into their ankles. Their feet were already beginning to grow numb.

Amy dropped down, sobbing. Hubbard lost all semblance of courage. He was whimpering and rubbing his feet.

Amy burst out: "I wish I'd gone with him. I trusted you to save me, and now I've got to die."

"We got to face things," Rod intervened. "I dunno how fer we are on the Santy Fe Trail. How fur back is the fork?"

But neither of the two was capable of answering him. Amy continued her tirade. Hubbard was trying to tear strips of cloth from his coat to fasten about his feet.

"Yeh, that's the trick," said Rod, "only yuh might hev thought of the lady first." He pulled Hubbard's coat from him and quickly tore several long strips of the cloth. Then, after briskly rubbing Amy's feet, he proceeded to fasten the strips about them, tying them with thinner pieces. He tossed the coat back to Hubbard.

The device was good enough as long as they sat still, but the first attempt to walk pulled the flimsy coverings apart.

Rod glanced contemptuously at the two—Amy, with her feet tucked under her, whimpering; Hubbard, trying to tear strips of the cloth with his fingers, and getting them tangled in the frayed ends. He said, "I'm goin' to try to make the fork. Thar oughter be a trader at Laramie. Ef I kin make it, I'll bring back help."

Suddenly Amy was on her feet, the cloth strips unwinding on the snow. She flung her arms around Rod's neck. "You'll save me—I trust you—I love you. You won't let me freeze to death out here!"

Rod thrust her away. He estimated that the train had traveled all day. That meant they were 20 miles from Laramie. And, even if he reached Laramie, he couldn't be sure that there would be a trader there in mid-winter.

But there was no chance of reaching Laramie. His impulse was simply to go down fighting.

A quarter-mile of jog-trotting over the frozen crust, until he could no longer feel his frozen feet; then a brisk rubbing with snow, till the circulation came stinging back; then on again, repeating the process time and again.

He was leaving bloody tracks, but that was a good sign, for as long as there was blood there was circulation. That became his test, for now he had no sensation in his feet. When he looked back and saw that the bloody tracks had ceased, he knew it was time to start the rubbing again.

His feet were swollen into shapeless masses of bruised flesh, and the touch was exquisite pain —but that was a good sign too. He tried to estimate the distance he had covered, but it was no use. He was losing all sense of time. The flow of blood had ceased, and now he could no longer obtain either blood or tingling by rubbing his feet

He was growing delirious. He had visions of green trees; a pleasant warmth began to pervade his being He opened his eyes. He had fallen beside the trail.

With an intolerable effort he managed to get on his feet again. They were like stumps beneath him, all feeling gone beneath the calf He tottered, then fell He got up on his hands and knees.

A horse was standing beside him A man was bending over him Keegan!

The shock of the discovery drove the vapors from Rod's brain; a current of strength suffused his body As he groaned, Keegan straightened himself, and the next moment Rod was on his feet with a bound, clutching at the other It was his frozen feet that gave him his hold, for he side-slipped as Keegan ducked, and falling, he grasped Keegan about the body

Keegan's fists hammered into Rod's face, but he only tightened his grip He shifted his grasp to Keegan's throat. The man's blows were battering Rod into unconsciousness, but he clung to his antagonist, and, swaying and reeling, he dragged Keegan this way and that. Every ounce of strength that Rod could draw from his nerveless body was centered in his hands.

Keegan's blows ceased; he grasped at Rod's hands, trying to pull them from his throat. In the moonlight Rod could see Keegan's face, bloated, filled with blood. Keegan was tottering, moaning.

Suddenly Rod shifted his left hand and swept Keegan's head back, pushed with his right. For a moment the man's body was tensed violently against his. Then the crack of the vertebrae sounded like the snap of a pistol, and Keegan's head dropped sidewise on his shoulder. His body quivered violently, then went limp.

Letting the body fall, Rod stood staring stupidly at it. Then, dropping beside it, he wrenched off the shoes, and peeled away the two pairs of heavy socks He rubbed his feet with snow He danced until he dropped upon his frozen stumps. He rubbed again until there was a tingling, and then a rush of pain. The blood began to ooze from his distorted feet.

Somehow he managed to get on the socks and shoes. He stood up, relieved Keegan of his rifle and bowie, flint-and-tinder box. He grasped the reins of the horse, which had stood close by through

out the struggle. With a mighty effort he clambered into the saddle.

All feeling had left his feet again, but his horse was eating up the miles. The moon was riding high. Surely he wasn't far from Laramie!

Then a pin-point glowed far out over the plains. Rod tried to pull himself together—this was fantasy. But it flashed out again, and another, and another, and the horse, sensible of what this meant, changed his course and broke into a gallop. The pin-points resolved themselves into the campfires of a wagon train. Rod shouted, and an answering halloo came across the darkness.

Then his last reserve of strength failed him. He was toppling sidewise from the horse, held up by two grim-faced, bearded men. Half-conscious, he felt himself being led in through the opening between the wagons. They propped him against a wagon while they gathered before him. He saw fists shaken at him.

"Shoot him!"

"Shootin's too good fer him! Let's string him up!"

A man of middle age with a square beard was pushing through the crowd, and the rest fell back to let him pass. He stopped in front of Rod, and surveyed him. "If you've got anything to say why you shouldn't pay the price of your evil murders, you'd best talk quick," he said. "I'm Brigham Young, and in command here."

"Yeh, I'll talk," said Rod. "But you got to save them two first—freezin'—mebbe dead by now—"

"Bring the brandy from my wagon," said Young.

Rod started as he felt the sting of the liquor on his tongue. Somehow he managed to tell them before he lapsed into complete unconsciousness.

It was daylight when he awoke. A young Mormon, who was watching beside him, said, "We found them."

He went out, and before Rod had quite regained his senses, Young was beside his bed in the covered wagon. "We've got the man and woman," he said. "Feet froze, but they're doing well. And now, friend, you've got a lot of explaining to do."

His manner was stiff, but he thawed when Rod told him the story. Rod said, "I guess they planned to make fer Santy Fe and sell the supplies, and leave it to be believed that you and yore folks ran off the wagons arter massacreeing the whole outfit."

"It looks that way," said Young, fingering his beard.

"We wuz to run them supplies up to General Johnston."

"That's why I was trying to catch up with you."

"Wal, there wud have be'n a fight anyways, wouldn't thar?"

asked Rod.

Young said sternly, "I was in Washington when General Johnston reached the passes. I reached an understanding with President Buchanan, and as a result I am on my way to General Johnston, to inform him that the Saints accept the supremacy of the United States of America and that he may enter Deseret unopposed as soon as the pass is clear."

"That shore is good news," said Rod. "I ain't got nothing agenst yore church, Mr. Young, and I'm plumb glad to know peace is proclaimed. But the General's got to git them supplies, or he'll be starvin' before the winter's over."

"He'll have them."

"But yuh got to stop Hogan and his crowd, and turn back the wagons."

"Plenty of time," said Young. "With three or four feet of snow on the ground, there won't be any trail to Santa Fe. We'll get them when we want them. The young lady said she wants to see you soon as you're able."

"Yeh, I'll see her," said Rod. "Soon as she likes."

A Mormon helped Amy into the wagon, her feet tied up in bandages, her face woebegone. Rod helped her to sit down beside him, and she burst into tears and fell upon his neck.

"Wal, now, everything's turnin' out all right," said Rod. "They're goin' after the wagons and they'll fix that gang and yuh'll be on yore way to yore uncle before yuh know it. How's Hubbard?"

"He's all right. He never thought about me."

"Don't yuh think," suggested Rod. "it might be as well to fergit all what's happened? You and him—"

"I hate him! He let that murderer get away, and take us prisoners."

"I kind of warned yuh, Miss Lanning—" Rod began.

"I wish I'd listened to you. I—I love you—I never want to see Frank Hubbard again."

"Now look, Miss Lanning, I ain't in yore class, and besides, thar's something more yuh don't know—"

"I know you killed your wife—she must have been a bad woman," Amy cried hysterically. "I don't care—about anything."

"Wal," ruminated Rod, "it seems to me we got to see what General Johnston will hev to say about that. Mebbe we'll git better acquainted on the trail. Yeh, we'll talk things over on the trail."

It wasn't until the third day thereafter, when Rod was well on the way to recovery, that Brigham Young said, "Well, we got them where we want them, Knight—no more than five-and-twenty miles south of here, off the trail and stalled in the snow. They'd stay there till the snows melted and showed them the trail again if I

was willing to let them.

"But I'm riding with about twenty of my men, Knight. We'll clean them up. They deserve no more mercy than a nest of rattlers, and I doubt if my men would show them any. Then we'll come back with the wagons and oxen, and meanwhile I'm leaving a half dozen men here to look out for you and Miss Lanning and that Hubbard fellow."

"I've be'n thinkin'," said Rod. "I allow I'll ride with yuh."

"You're not fit to ride, Knight. You'll stay behind."

"No," said Rod, "I'm ridin'." I've got my own score to settle with that gang. And I don't use my feet in ridin'."

"Well, it's your funeral, I guess, if you feel that way."

As a matter of fact, the problem of Amy Lanning had been getting too much for Rod. He had had no talk with Hubbard, who hobbled sulkily about the enclosure, but Amy had come to see him every day, and had always gone away hysterical. Despite her selfishness, the girl could exercise considerable power over Rod, if he let himself go. He realized that it was the turning-point of his life, and, in his perplexity, he decided to take his problem to Brigham Young.

"It's this way, yuh see," Rod explained. "I onct killed a woman, Young. She was my wife. God knows I'd enough reason to, because she wasn't fit to live. But I remember in Holy Writ, 'Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord.'"

"'I will repay,'" quoted Young. "Well, you've repented, haven't you, Knight?"

"I've repented, but that don't take away the mem'ry of it. I wuz readin' about Cain, after he killed his brother. God made him a fugitive and a wanderer. And that's what He's made me. Thar's be'n nary rest fer me sence. I've found no peace except when I'm travelin'. How kin I link up my life with that of a young woman, even though she knows about my past?"

Young stroked his beard thoughtfully. "It looks to me like it's the Spirit striving in you, Knight," he said. "My advice is come with us to Deseret. There, if you feel that way, you can join the Saints, and obtain forgiveness of your sins. And now I'm saying once more, you rest up in camp instead of coming with us tomorrow."

Rod shook his head. "I'm goin' to help clean out that nest of sidewinders."

They rode all day, and rested behind a rise a half mile from the wagons. The bitter cold had given place to warmer weather, and a fresh snowfall had removed the crust of ice, making easier traveling for the horses. It was about an hour before dawn that the cir-

cle closed on the wagons.

They stood pointing in all directions as they had stuck in the snow. There was no order and there were no sentries. The Mormons were among them before the alarm was given.

"Don't hit the oxen," had been Young's warning, and that order prolonged the lives of the teamsters who dived frantically among the beasts for shelter. Young rode like a madman, using his empty rifle as a club. After him came his men, swinging their stocks or slashing with their bowies, chasing the teamsters out from behind the oxen like terriers hunting rats, knifing and clubbing them.

Rod saw a man slide into a saddle and make for the open, and recognized Hogan. He spurred after him.

Hogan turned—he had recharged his rifle—and fired. The ball grazed Rod's right hand, numbing it. Rod shifted the bowie to his left, and as their horses came together with a shock, leaned sidewise and thrust Hogan through the heart. He toppled, wrenching the knife from Rod's hand in his fall. His horse careened away in panic. Rod sat looking down at the dead man.

His charge had carried him outside the wagons, and left him unobserved. Seated there like a statue, in a single moment he reviewed his dilemma, and his course seemed clear. A fugitive and a wanderer—that was what he must be, that the curse might not rest too heavily upon him.

He turned his horse and rode into the dawn.

White man: "I don't see how you stand this cold—here I am all bundled up and still shivering, and you wear one thin blanket and don't seem to be cold at all."

Red man: "Is your face cold?"

White man: "No, but I'm almost frozen everywhere else."

Red man: "Me all face."

Sundown Slim reached town at noon one day, went directly into the nearest saloon, and by three o'clock was tolerably well oiled. At four he emerged, mounted his bronc, rode him into the department store, and straight to the elevator.

The operator blocked the door. "Sorry, cowboy, no horses allowed."

"Listen bud," hiccupped Sundown, "I *gotta* take him up on the elevator!"

"Why?"

"Dern fool allus gets sick when he rides the escalator!"

WHEN JOHNNY REBER *arrives at the Mohawk mine for a summer's job he soon finds out that the warning the general manager gave him was not at all exaggerated. Young Johnny knows that he can never achieve status among the hard-bitten miners until he earns a nickname, and it certainly doesn't look as though that will happen before he departs for college in the fall—that is, not until the night the ghost walks. This story is published here for the first time.*

THE GHOST WALKS

By JOSEPH F. HOOK

THE red hair on young Johnny Reber's scalp lifted. His mouth and blue eyes opened simultaneously. The shovel fell from limp fingers. The pale light from a candle, stuck in a niche of rock, faintly outlined the ghostly apparition that had so suddenly raised up beyond the pile of blasted waste rock.

The sudden tomblike silence of the mine added to the abject fear that gripped Johnny and rooted his feet to the spot. And the eerie silence actually accentuated the dismal groans now uttered by the ghastly specter. To Johnny's memory came stories of mines haunted by the spirits of miners who had died in them, as told so vividly by Dynamite Doogan in the bunkhouse only last night.

Sweat oozed from every pore in Johnny's body. Then, by a great effort, he somehow managed to move his feet. He let out a yell that echoed through the mine, then turned and fled.

Long legs rose and fell with the speed and precision of pistons as he pounded down the drift. Nor did he slacken speed at the crosscut. His shirt tail flapped in a breeze of his own creating. Down the level he tore and out into the welcome Arizona sunlight. He sank down on a pile of mine stulls, used for timbering, breath coming in sucking gasps, eyes still protruding.

Miners appeared at the mouth of the tunnel, slapping thighs in high glee. In the foreground was Dynamite Doogan, he of the haunted-mine yarns, a white sheet over an arm, the perpetrator of another eminently successful practi-

cal joke.

They soon trooped back into the tunnel, leaving Johnny Reber to his thoughts. And bitter ones they were, too. He was recalling the circumstances of his coming to the Mohawk mine, two miles from the tent town of Yucca and half that from the Mexican border.

After high school commencement exercises, Johnny had accosted the general manager of the Gold Consolidated Company in his Los Angeles office, in hope of bringing about a long-cherished dream.

He explained to the manager, "After the vacation I'm going to enroll in the School of Mines. I want to be a mining engineer. I figured you'd give me a job so's I'd learn something of the practical end of it."

The manager told Johnny, "You've got a good head on those broad shoulders, kid, and I like your looks. I can find a place for you in our Mohawk mine, a development project. At present we're taking out waste rock, but we'll soon be into ore. Ever been away from home before, Johnny?"

"No, sir."

"Then," the manager said, "you're due for some unusual experiences. The Mohawk camp's a rugged place. The miners and muckers surely dish it out, and take it too. But no matter what happens, don't get discouraged. And stay out of Yucca."

"I will, sir. I've heard what it's like."

Johnny had soon learned that the manager's description of the Mohawk camp had been a gross understatement. Rugged didn't describe the real conditions. The outbuildings had been constructed on the waste dump as it was extended. When the sun struck the corrugated iron roofing, the buildings became furnaces. The waste dump was high, affording a view of the surrounding desert for miles, through the shimmering heat waves of which one could faintly discern the white tents of Yucca.

Tough and primitive as the living conditions were, however, they could not hold a candle to the men. In Johnny they discovered a trusting soul who, in his eagerness to learn, believed everything they told him, making it that much easier to put over their little jokes.

The manager's admonition to Johnny not to become discouraged was the hardest assignment yet. Johnny realized with a sinking heart that he was to be the camp's chore boy. If a mucker laid off, Johnny took his place in level, drift, stope, or raise. He trammed stulls from the dump to the timbering crew.

If a miner's partner laid off, the other would allow him to help set up the drilling machine, but never

operate it. He'd send Johnny to the powder magazine, an offset in the crosscut, but wouldn't allow him to crimp the powerful primers on the fuse, insert them in the dynamite sticks, or load the drilled holes.

Johnny's protests always brought the discouraging reply, "Too dangerous for a kid. Later on, sometime—mebbe." Nevertheless, he watched every move, storing the knowledge in his memory for future use.

That was discouraging, but not quite so much as the knowledge that the men had not accepted him as one of them. To be accepted, Johnny reasoned, a man must have had bestowed upon him a nickname denoting prowess in some particular line of mining endeavor. For instance, there was Hardrock Hannigan, the foreman, Capper Moley, Driller Gergman, Dynamite Doogan, Nipper Nason, and so on. To them Johnny was "kid," "son," "punk," "squirt," "button," and, most galling of all, "babe."

The foreman's bull-like bellow, coming from the tunnel mouth, snapped the thread of Johnny's reverie. "Come down off'n that pile of stulls, squirt, and get the lead out."

Johnny started studying that evening, in order to help ease the ache of discouragement. Presently Dynamite Doogan sauntered over to Johnny's bunk.

"What's the book about, punk?" he inquired.

"Spanish," Johnny replied, and added, "Many American mining outfits own properties in Mexico. Some day I'll manage one."

"You'll have chin whiskers clear down to your knees afore that happens," Dynamite laughed. He glanced around the bunkhouse and his gaze rested on Hot Tamale Padillo. "Hey, come over here, Hot Tamale," he sang out. "You're a Mex and you'd oughta be able to help the kid out."

A look of disdain flashed into Hot Tamale's black eyes. "I spik Eengleesh," he said. "Me, I am American. I no use for Spanish."

A week before, Johnny had made the same suggestion to Hot Tamale and had been turned down. Johnny thought he knew why. In the first place, Hot Tamale couldn't read. In the second place, almost all his spare time was spent in Yucca, squandering his wages. And, lastly, he liked to put in his two-bits' worth of boasting about his prowess, both in and out of the mine, in the only language the miners understood.

So Johnny went on studying, thereby missing out on the exchange of winks between Dynamite and the others. Dynamite had seen the opening afforded by the Spanish book and was quick to make the most of it.

"Say," he said, "tomorrer the

ghost walks." When he saw Johnny glance up at him questioningly, he explained. "Payday to you, button." Then to the audience: "Wonder if them bandits'll try to hold us up again."

"Shouldn't wonder," Capper said.

"Bandits!" Johnny gasped. "What bandits?"

Dynamite went to town on that. "A band of 'em snook up on the camp, with the idee of swiping our dough. Well, the boss is a light sleeper and he heard 'em climbing up the waste dump. He let out a yell, warning us. We grabbed double-jack handles and lit inta them. Man, that was some scrap."

Nipper Nason took it from there. "They'd have slit our throats, too. Mebbe they'll try it again."

Then Driller Gergman added his share, keeping a straight face with difficulty. "That gives me an idee, boys. We'd oughta take turns standing guard."

"You got something there," Dynamite agreed.

Hot Tamale rose languidly from the bench and said, "Me, I have better idea. I go to Yucca and mebbe I see these bad mans, no? If yes, I hurry back to camp and we keep ze eye opener for them. *Si, Señor* Dynamite?"

"*Si, Señor* Hot Tamale," Dynamite said with mock grace.

Johnny lay awake a long time that night, thinking. Tomorrow was payday, the first in his 17 years. The foreman would hand him $150, and he'd earn as much again before school started. It was pleasant, lying there in the bunk and visualizing how far the money would go toward paying his way through college.

Pleasant, that is, until he recalled Dynamite's lurid account of the bandits. Johnny had no means of checking the accuracy of that night-attack story. Certainly, since Johnny's arrival in the camp, events had lent authenticity to it. Word of fist, gun, and knife fights in Yucca had filtered into the camp. Anything might happen.

Miners and muckers lay in their bunks, in all manner of postures and variegated underwear, mouths open, sleeping and snoring contentedly. Into this discordant chorus of snorts and wheezes intruded the squeaking of a hinge, followed by the opening of the bunkhouse door, inch by slow inch.

Johnny tried to shout a warning to his fellow workers, but his tongue stuck to the roof of a mouth suddenly gone dry. Eyes glued to that door, he presently saw a figure entering. The faint moonlight from a sickle moon silhouetted it.

Then Johnny relaxed with an audible sigh. The figure was Hot Tamale Padillo.

He came across to Johnny's

bunk on unsteady legs and said thickly, "I see no bad mans in Yucca. You go sleep like leetle babee. *Buenos noches, Señor* Punk."

The next sound Johnny heard was laughter and the scuffing of boots. Sunlight streamed in through the bunkhouse windows as the miners dressed hurriedly.

"Payday! Yippee!" Dynamite Doogan yelled, and the rest joined in the hilarity.

From the mess hall came the shrill, high-pitched voice of Choo Wang, the cook. "Bleakflask! Flapjacks, blisklicks and blacon! Come getteel"

After supper that evening the men formed in line outside the foreman's shack and received their month's wages in cash. Johnny, being the latest addition to the force, entered last. Hardrock Hannigan noticed the happy smile as the lad fondled the bills.

"Look, punk," Hardrock said in a serious vein. "When the big boss wrote me you was coming, he said he'd hold me pussonally responsible if you went haywire. So I'm gonna see you don't, savvy? Better hand me back that dough and I'll give you a receipt for it. I'll lock it up in the safe till you're ready to go back to school."

"That suits me," Johnny agreed. "And thanks, Hardrock."

"Now here's something else, button," Hardrock said, putting the bills in the safe. "Three-four sets in the stope caved in today. The timber crew's got it partly ketched up, but it'll take a lot more stulls to finish the job. How'd you like to tram them in tonight so's the boys can finish the job fust thing in the morning? I'll give you double time for it."

"Sure, I'll do it," Johnny agreed readily.

By midnight Johnny was regretting his readiness to earn the extra pay. He wished now that he had let someone else jump at the chance. The buildings were dark, their outlines barely discernible in the faint glow from the sickle moon. The silence of the desert was awesome, eerie. Johnny had no idea that anything could be so deathly still. Nor had he ever felt so lonely and, he had to confess to himself, so frightened. This was another and new experience, and he hoped and prayed it would be the last.

He trammed another load of stulls into the tunnel, leaving it just within the entrance. He returned then to the dwindling stock pile on the dump, anxious to find out how many more loads were left and to figure out how much longer it would take him. He wanted to get the job over and done with and back to the bunkhouse.

He was counting the stulls when he heard voices. He stepped to the edge of the high waste-rock dump and peered over. He saw a huddle

of vague figures at the base, heads together, talking in low voices. Some of the words drifted up to Johnny—Spanish words that he understood.

"Bandits!" Johnny gasped, and stepped back quickly.

Fear gripped him then, leaving only his brain active. He turned his head finally, in the direction of the bunkhouse. He forced open his mouth, to voice a warning, then checked it before it could pass his dry lips. If he called, the sleeping miners might not hear him. However, the bandits would, and they'd scramble up the face of the dump and attack the miners before they could defend themselves.

Johnny took another look over the edge of the dump. Now the figures were scrambling up the face of it. The faint moonlight glinted dully on the weapons in their hands. Johnny made a lightning calculation of the distance from where he was standing to the bunkhouse and to the tunnel, and decided in favor of the latter. Then, with brains and legs working at top speed, he dashed for the entrance.

He sped past the timber-laden flatcar and kept going until he reached the crosscut, where the dynamite was stored and where he had left his candle so that he could see to set the rail switches in the direction the stulls must go.

He hurriedly cut off a very short length of fuse, rammed a box of primer caps into a pocket, picked up a partly emptied box of dynamite, and tucked it under his arm. He snatched the candlestick from the stull in which he had previously stuck it and raced back to the loaded car.

Out went the candle. Johnny tossed it over his shoulder. Now, in the intense blackness, he repeatedly tripped over the narrow-gauge ties, banged cruelly against the hanging wall, caromed off, and sped onward.

Instinct alone guided him. As a result, he reached the loaded flatcar sooner than he had anticipated. The blunt nose of a stull smashed against his chest, setting him back violently on his haunches and driving the breath from his lungs.

He scrambled up, retrieved the box of dynamite sticks and shoved it between the rails. He lost precious time fumbling in his pocket for the primer caps and inserting the short fuse in one of them. In his frantic haste he cut a finger while splitting the fuse end. When he touched a match to it, it spat fire in his face, singeing his eyebrows and lashes. Then he dropped the spitting fuse, with cap attached, into the box of dynamite sticks and rushed from the tunnel.

Standing well back from the mouth, he waited in trembling impatience. In the ominous silence Johnny heard loose waste rock

rattling down the face of the dump. He knew the short length of fuse was good only for a few seconds, but they were the longest he'd ever lived through.

Now heads were outlined just above the rim of the dump. Dark, greedy eyes surveyed the buildings Then shoulders appeared, then bodies and legs, and finally the figures stood in a group, whispering.

The dynamite exploded with a terrific roar. The tunnel belched flame, smoke—and stulls. Like great blunted arrows, they shot through the air, aflame from the intense heat of the explosion, closely followed by the twisted, flailing mine car.

Some of the flaming stulls over shot the rim. Those that fell short plowed deep furrows, flinging showers of loose rock ahead of them.

As the echoes of the explosion died away in the washes and arroyos, screams and shouts rent the air. The bunkhouse door flew open and the miners poured through in their underwear. Hardrock Hannigan, the foreman, was followed closely by Choo Wang with a long, keen butcher knife.

All came to a wondering, muttering halt when the light from the blazing stulls revealed the prostrate figures on the dump. They turned questioning eyes on Johnny as he emerged from the half-gloom and joined them. Hardrock's glance shuttled between the silent lad and the mouth of the tunnel that the blast had effectually sealed.

"Those bandits — they came again," Johnny stammered, "like Dynamite Doogan said they might. It—it was the only way I could warn you, Hardrock, and scare—"

Hardrock cut in curtly, "Ain't no bandits ever come here before. Sounds like another of your tall tales, Dynamite. Only it looks like this'n come true."

Dynamite said sheepishly, "I was just filling the kid fulla hot air, was all. Never dreamed anything would come of it. I recognize them fellers. They're Mex barflies from Yucca—bums."

Hardrock said, "It's a miracle them hombres wasn't cut to pieces by them flying stulls. Concussion and a rock or two knocked 'em cold. And it's a miracle us guys is alive now."

There came a moan, and a man clawed to his knees, started away, dragging a useless leg behind him. Choo Wang barred the way, brandishing his butcher knife and jabbering excitedly in Chinese.

Nipper Nason suddenly let out a yell. "Here's Hot Tamale, Hardrock! He went to Yucca again tonight, right after he got his pay."

Hardrock crossed over and stared down at the unconscious miner. "Fully dressed, huh?" he growled

significantly, then asked, "Any of you boys see him come back?"

When they all shook their heads, Hardrock took another look at Hot Tamale. "A chunk of rock smacked him a good one," he said, "and he'll be out cold for a long time."

He rubbed his chin reflectively, his glance traveling over the underwear-clad miners. Without another word he wheeled and picked up the man with the broken leg, carrying him to the edge of the dump.

"Listen, hombre," he snarled, "either you cough up, or over you go, bust leg or no bust leg. What's this all about?"

Abject terror displaced the agony of pain in the man's eyes. "Don't keel me, *señor!*" he pleaded. "Thees one you call ze Hot Tamale, it ees hees idea. He tell us we make easy monee. Payday here. Everybody he got lotsa monee. Ze Chinaman, he say, have saved ze first dollar he make in belt around hees—"

Choo Wang let out a screech of rage and had to be restrained from attacking the man. Hardrock laid the man down and said, "And I don't s'pose he told you he got the idee from a loose-mouthed guy called Dynamite, did he?"

"No, *señor.* All he say was he get half ze monee."

Hardrock turned abruptly from him and sang out, "You guys pick up these here rats and rush 'em to the sawbones at Yucca."

His stern face broke into a grin when he saw the men grouped around Johnny and slapping him heartily on the back and all talking at once. Dynamite Doogan shouldered them aside and grabbed the lad's hand in a grip that made him wince.

"Thanks a lot, Blow-'em-down Johnny," was all he said.

Blow-'em-down Johnny! Johnny Reber's grin broadened and his heart pounded with joy. No more of those galling kid names. No more of that beck-and-call stuff, or that stand-offish business. By that nickname these rough and ready men of the desert had put their stamp of approval on Johnny Reber.

At last he had been accepted as an equal into the fraternity of those who made a living below ground.

Answers to "Great Lawmen of the West" Quiz on page 137

1. Pat Garrett
2. Wild Bill Hickok
3. Wyatt Earp
4. Dallas Stoudenmire
5. Bat Masterson
6. Billy Breakinridge
7. John Slaughter
8. Bill Tilghman
9. Bucky O'Neill
10. John R. Hughes

A Famous Story of the Old West

Brown of Calaveras

By BRET HARTE

JACK HAMLIN, *gambler, looks into a pair of eyes on the Wingdam coach, and his attitude toward the opposite sex undergoes an abrupt reversal. Strangely, too, resulting events from this chance meeting involve the fortunes and happiness of Jack's old acquaintance, Brown of Calaveras. This typically sentimental, deftly written tale was first published in book form in the author's* The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches *(1870).*

A SUBDUED tone of conversation, and the absence of cigar smoke and boot heels at the windows of the Wingdam stagecoach, made it evident that one of the inside passengers was a woman. A disposition on the part of loungers at the stations to congregate before the window, and some concern in regard to the appearance of coats, hats, and collars, further indicated that she was lovely. All of which Mr. Jack Hamlin, on the box seat, noted with the smile of cynical philosophy. Not that he depreciated the sex, but that he recognized therein a deceitful element, the pursuit of which sometimes drew mankind away from the equally uncertain blandishments of poker—of which it may

be remarked that Mr. Hamlin was a professional exponent.

So that, when he placed his narrow boot on the wheel and leaped down, he did not even glance at the window from which a green veil was fluttering, but lounged up and down with that listless and grave indifference of his class, which was perhaps the next thing to good breeding. With his closely buttoned figure and self-contained air he was a marked contrast to the other passengers, with their feverish restlessness and boisterous emotion, and even Bill Masters, a graduate of Harvard, with his slovenly dress, his overflowing vitality, his intense appreciation of lawlessness and barbarism and his mouth filled with crackers and cheese, cut but an unromantic figure beside this lonely calculator of chances, with his pale Greek face and Homeric gravity.

The driver called "All aboard!" and Mr. Hamlin returned to the coach. His foot was upon the wheel, and his face raised to the level of the open window, when, at the same moment, what appeared to him to be the finest eyes in the world suddenly met his. He quietly dropped down again, addressed a few words to one of the inside passengers, effected an exchange of seats, and as quietly took his place inside. Mr. Hamlin never allowed his philosophy to interfere with decisive and prompt action.

This irruption of Jack cast some restraint upon the other passengers, particularly those who were making themselves most agreeable to the lady. One of them leaned forward, and apparently conveyed to her information regarding Mr. Hamlin's profession in a single epithet. Whether Mr. Hamlin heard it, or whether he recognized in the informant a distinguished jurist, from whom, but a few evenings before, he had won several thousand dollars, I cannot say. His colorless face betrayed no sign; his black eyes, quietly observant, glanced indifferently past the legal gentleman and rested on the much more pleasing features of his neighbor. An Indian stoicism—said to be an inheritance from his maternal ancestor—stood him in good service, until the rolling wheels rattled upon the river gravel at Scott's Ferry, and the stage drew up at the International Hotel for dinner.

The legal gentleman and a member of Congress leaped out, and stood ready to assist the descending goddess, while Colonel Starbottle, of Siskiyou, took charge of her parasol and shawl. In this multiplicity of attention there was a momentary confusion and delay.

Jack Hamlin quietly opened the *opposite* door of the coach, took the lady's hand with that decision and positiveness which a hesitating and undecided sex know how to admire, and in an instant had

dexterously and gracefully swung her to the ground, and again lifted her to the platform.

An audible chuckle on the box came from that other cynic, "Yuba Bill," the driver. "Look keerfully arter that baggage, Kernel," said the expressman, with affected concern, as he looked after Colonel Starbottle, gloomily bringing up the rear of the triumphant procession to the waiting-room.

Mr. Hamlin did not stay for dinner. His horse was already saddled, and awaiting him. He dashed over the ford, up the gravelly hill, and out into the dusty perspective of the Wingdam road, like one leaving an unpleasant fancy behind him. The inmates of dusty cabins by the roadside shaded their eyes with their hands, and looked after him, recognizing the man by his horse, and speculating what "was up with Comanche Jack." Yet much of this interest centered in the horse, in a community where the time made by "French Pete's" mare, in his run from the Sheriff of Calaveras, eclipsed all concern in the ultimate fate of that worthy.

The sweating flanks of his gray at length recalled him to himself. He checked his speed, and, turning into a byroad, sometimes used as a cutoff, trotted leisurely along, the reins hanging listlessly from his fingers.

As he rode on, the character of the landscape changed, and became more pastoral. Openings in groves of pine and sycamore disclosed some rude attempts at cultivation. A flowering vine trailed over the porch of one cabin and a woman rocked her cradled babe under the roses of another. A little farther on Mr. Hamlin came upon some barelegged children, wading in the willowy creek, and so wrought upon them with a badinage peculiar to himself that they were emboldened to climb up his horse's legs and over his saddle, until he developed an exaggerated ferocity of demeanor, and escaped, leaving behind some kisses and coin.

And then, advancing deeper into the woods, where all signs of habitation failed, he began to sing, uplifting a tenor so singularly sweet, and shaded by a pathos so subduing and tender, that the robins and linnets stopped to listen. Mr. Hamlin's voice was not cultivated; the subject of his song was some sentimental lunacy, borrowed from the Negro minstrels; but there thrilled through all some occult quality of tone and expression that was unspeakably touching. Indeed, it was a wonderful sight to see this sentimental blackleg, with a pack of cards in his pocket and a revolver at his back, sending his voice before him through the dim woods with a plaint about his "Nelly's grave" in a way that overflowed the eyes of the listener.

A sparrow hawk, fresh from his sixth victim, possibly recognizing in Mr. Hamlin a kindred spirit, stared at him in surprise, and confessed the superiority of the man. With a superior predatory capacity, *he* couldn't sing.

But Mr. Hamlin presently found himself again on the highroad, and at his former pace. Ditches and banks of gravel, denuded hillsides, stumps, and decayed trunks of trees, took the place of woodland and ravine, and indicated his approach to civilization. Then a church steeple came in sight, and he knew that he had reached home.

In a few moments he was clattering down the single narrow street that lost itself in a chaotic ruin of races, ditches, and tailings at the foot of the hill, and dismounted before the gilded windows of the Magnolia saloon. Passing through the long barroom, he pushed open a green baize door, entered a dark passage, opened another door with a passkey, and found himself in a dimly lighted room, whose furniture, though elegant and costly for the locality, showed signs of abuse. The inlaid center table was overlaid with stained disks that were not contemplated in the original design. The embroidered armchairs were discolored, and the green velvet lounge, on which Mr. Hamlin threw himself, was soiled at the foot with the red soil of Wingdam.

Mr. Hamlin did not sing in his cage. He lay still, looking at a highly colored painting above him, representing a young creature of opulent charms. It occurred to him then for the first time that he had never seen exactly that kind of a woman and that, if he should, he would not, probably, fall in love with her. Perhaps he was thinking of another style of beauty. But just then someone knocked at the door. Without rising, he pulled a cord that apparently shot back a bolt, for the door swung open, and a man entered.

The newcomer was broad-shouldered and robust—a vigor not borne out in the face, which, though handsome, was singularly weak and disfigured by dissipation. He appeared to be also under the influence of liquor, for he started on seeing Mr. Hamlin, said, "I thought Kate was here," stammered, and seemed confused and embarrassed.

Mr. Hamlin smiled the smile which he had before worn on the Wingdam coach, and sat up, quite refreshed and ready for business.

"You didn't come up on the stage," continued the newcomer, "did you?"

"No," replied Hamlin, "I left it at Scott's Ferry. It isn't due for half an hour yet. But how's luck, Brown?"

"Damn' bad," said Brown, his face suddenly assuming an expression of weak despair. "I'm cleaned

out again, Jack," he continued in a whining tone that formed a pitiable contrast to his bulky figure. "Can't you help me with a hundred till tomorrow's clean-up? You see, I've got to send money home to the old woman, and—you've won twenty times that amount from me."

The conclusion was perhaps not entirely logical, but Jack overlooked it, and handed the sum to his visitor. "The old woman business is about played out, Brown," he added by way of commentary. "Why don't you say you want to buck agin' faro? You know you ain't married!"

"Fact, sir," said Brown with sudden gravity, as if the mere contact of the gold with the palm of the hand had imparted some dignity to his frame. "I've got a wife —a damn' good one, too, if I do say it—in the States. It's three year since I've seen her, and a year since I've writ to her. When things is about straight and we get down to the lead, I'm going to send for her."

"And Kate?" queried Mr. Hamlin with his previous smile.

Mr. Brown of Calaveras essayed an archness of glance to cover his confusion, which his weak face and whisky-muddled intellect but poorly carried out, and said, "Damn it, Jack, a man must have a little liberty, you know. But come, what do you say to a little game? Give us a show to double this hundred."

Jack Hamlin looked curiously at his fatuous friend. Perhaps he knew that the man was predestined to lose the money, and preferred that it should flow back into his own coffers rather than any other. He nodded his head, and drew his chair toward the table. At the same moment there came a rap upon the door.

"It's Kate," said Mr. Brown.

Mr. Hamlin shot back the bolt, and the door opened. For the first time in his life, he staggered to his feet, utterly unnerved and abashed; for the first time in his life the hot blood crimsoned his colorless cheeks to his forehead. For before him stood the lady he had lifted from the Wingdam coach, whom Brown—dropping his cards with a hysterical laugh—greeted as:

"My old woman, by thunder!"

They say that Mrs. Brown burst into tears and reproaches of her husband. I saw her in 1857 at Marysville, and disbelieve the story. And the Wingdam Chronicle, of the next week, under the head of "Touching Reunion," said: *One of those beautiful and touching incidents, peculiar to California life, occurred last week in our city. The wife of one of Wingdam's eminent pioneers, tired of the effete civilization of the East and its inhospitable climate, resolved to join her noble husband upon these golden shores. Without informing him of her in-*

tention, she undertoook the long journey, and arrived last week. The joy of the husband may be easier imagined than described. The meeting is said to have been indescribably affecting. We trust her example may be followed.

Whether owing to Mrs. Brown's influence, or to some more successful speculations, Mr. Brown's financial fortune from that day steadily improved. He bought out his partners in the "Nip and Tuck" lead with money which was said to have been won at poker, a week or two after his wife's arrival, but which rumor, adopting Mr. Brown's theory that Brown had forsworn the gaming-table, declared to have been furnished by Mr. Jack Hamlin. He built and furnished the Wingdam House, which pretty Mrs. Brown's great popularity kept overflowing with guests. He was elected to the Assembly, and gave largess to churches. A street in Wingdam was named in his honor.

Yet it was noted that in proportion as he waxed wealthy and fortunate, he grew pale, thin, and anxious. As his wife's popularity increased, he became fretful and impatient. The most devoted of husbands, he was absurdly jealous. If he did not interfere with his wife's social liberty, it was because it was maliciously whispered that his first and only attempt was met by an outburst from Mrs. Brown that terrified him into silence.

Much of this kind of gossip came from those of her own sex whom she had supplanted in the chivalrous attentions of Wingdam, which, like most popular chivalry, was devoted to an admiration of power, whether of masculine force or feminine beauty. It should be remembered too, in her extenuation, that since her arrival she had been the unconscious priestess of a mythological worship, perhaps not more ennobling to her womanhood than that which distinguished an older Greek democracy. I think that Brown was dimly conscious of this. But his only confidant was Jack Hamlin, whose reputation naturally precluded any open intimacy with the family, and whose visits were infrequent.

It was midsummer, and a moonlit night: and Mrs. Brown, very rosy, large-eyed, and pretty, sat upon the piazza, enjoying the fresh incense of the mountain breeze, and, it is to be feared, another incense which was not so fresh, nor quite as innocent. Beside her sat Colonel Starbottle and Judge Boompointer, and a later addition to her court, in the shape of a foreign tourist. She was in good spirits.

"What do you see down the road?" inquired the gallant Colonel, who had been conscious for the last few minutes that Mrs.

Brown's attention was diverted.

"Dust," said Mrs. Brown with a sigh. "Only Sister Anne's 'flock of sheep.'"

The Colonel, whose literary recollections did not extend farther back than last week's paper, took a more practical view. "It ain't sheep," he continued, "it's a horseman. Judge, ain't that Jack Hamlin's gray?"

But the judge didn't know, and, as Mrs. Brown suggested the air was growing too cold for further investigations, they retired to the parlor.

Mr. Brown was in the stable, where he generally retired after dinner Perhaps it was to show his contempt for his wife's companions; perhaps, like other weak natures, he found pleasure in the exercise of absolute power over inferior animals. He had a certain gratification in the training of a chestnut mare, whom he could beat or caress as pleased him, which he couldn't do with Mrs. Brown. It was here that he recognized a certain gray horse which had just come in, and looking a little farther on, found his rider.

Brown's greeting was cordial and hearty; Mr. Hamlin's somewhat restrained. But at Brown's urgent request, he followed him up the back stairs to a narrow corridor, and thence to a small room looking out upon the stable yard. It was plainly furnished with a bed, a table, a few chairs, and a rack for guns and whips.

"This yer's my home, Jack," said Brown with a sigh, as he threw himself upon the bed, and motioned his companion to a chair. "Her room's t'other end of the hall. It's more'n six months since we've lived together, or met, except for meals. It's mighty rough papers on the head of the house, ain't it?" he said with a forced laugh. "But I'm glad to see you, Jack, damn' glad," and he reached from the bed, and again shook the unresponsive hand of Jack Hamlin.

"I brought ye up here, for I didn't want to talk in the stable; though, for the matter of that, it's all round town. Don't strike a light. We can talk here in the moonshine. Put up your feet on that winder, and sit here beside me. Thar's whisky in that jug."

Mr. Hamlin did not avail himself of the invitation. Brown of Calaveras turned his face to the wall and continued: "If I didn't love the woman, Jack, I wouldn't mind. But it's loving her, and seeing her, day arter day, goin' on at this rate, and no one to put down the brake; that's what gits me! But I'm glad to see ye, Jack, damn' glad."

In the darkness he groped about until he had found and wrung his companion's hand again. He would have detained it, but Jack slipped it into the buttoned breast of his coat and asked listlessly,

"How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since she came here; ever since the day she walked into the Magnolia. I was a fool then, Jack; I'm a fool now; but I didn't know how much I loved her till then. And she hasn't been the same woman since.

"But that ain't all, Jack, and it's what I wanted to see you about, and I'm glad you've come. It ain't that she doesn't love me any more; it ain't that she fools with every chap that comes along, for perhaps I staked her love and lost it, as I did everything else at the Magnolia—and perhaps foolin' is nateral to some women, and thar ain't no great harm done, 'cept to the fools. But, Jack, I think—I think she loves somebody else. Don't move, Jack; don't move; if your pistol hurts ye, take it off.

"It's been more'n six months now that she's seemed unhappy and lonesome, and kinder nervous and scared like. And sometimes I've ketched her lookin' at me sort of timid and pitying. And for the last week she's been gathering her own things—trinkets, and furbelows, and jew'lry—and Jack, I think she's goin' off. I could stand all but that. To have her steal away like a thief—" He put his face downward to the pillow, and for a few moments there was no sound but the ticking of a clock on the mantel.

Mr. Hamlin lit a cigar, and moved to the open window. The moon no longer shone into the room, and the bed and its occupant were in shadow.

"What shall I do, Jack?" said the voice from the darkness.

The answer came promptly and clearly from the window-side: "Spot the man, and kill him on sight."

"But, Jack!"

"He's took the risk!"

"But will that bring *her* back?"

Jack did not reply, but moved from the window toward the door.

"Don't go yet, Jack; light the candle, and sit by the table. It's a comfort to see ye, if nothin' else."

Jack hesitated, and then complied. He drew a pack of cards from his pocket and shuffled them, glancing at the bed. But Brown's face was turned to the wall. When Mr. Hamlin had shuffled the cards, he cut them, and dealt one card on the opposite side of the table and toward the bed, and another on his side of the table for himself. The first was a deuce, his own card a king. He then shuffled and cut again. This time "dummy" had a queen, and himself a four-spot. Jack brightened up for the third deal. It brought his adversary a deuce, and himself a king again.

"Two out of three," said Jack audibly.

"What's that, Jack?" said Brown.

"Nothing."

Then Jack tried his hand with dice, but he always threw sixes and his imaginary opponent aces. The force of habit is sometimes confusing.

Meanwhile some magnetic influence in Mr. Hamlin's presence, or the anodyne of liquor, or both, brought surcease of sorrow, and Brown slept.

Mr. Hamlin moved his chair to the window, and looked out on the town of Wingdam, now sleeping peacefully, its harsh outline softened and subdued, its glaring colors mellowed and sobered in the moonlight that flowed over all. In the hush he could hear the gurgling of water in the ditches, and the sighing of the pines beyond the hill. Then he looked up at the firmament, and as he did so a star shot across the twinkling field. Presently another, and then another.

The phenomenon suggested to Mr. Hamlin a fresh augury. If in another 15 minutes another star should fall— He sat there, watch in hand, for twice that time, but the phenomenon was not repeated.

The clock struck two, and Brown still slept. Mr. Hamlin approached the table, and took from his pocket a letter, which he read by the flickering candle light. It contained only a single line, written in pencil, in a woman's hand: *Be at the corral, with the buggy, at three.*

The sleeper moved uneasily, and then awoke. "Are you there, Jack?"

"Yes."

"Don't go yet. I dreamed just now, Jack—dreamed of old times I thought that Sue and me was being married agin, and that the parson, Jack, was—who do you think?—you!"

The gambler laughed, and seated himself on the bed, the paper still in his hand.

"It's a good sign, ain't it?" queried Brown.

"I reckon. Say, old man, hadn't you better get up?"

The "old man," thus affectionately appealed to, rose with the assistance of Hamlin's outstretched hand.

"Smoke?"

Brown mechanically took the proffered cigar.

"Light?"

Jack had twisted the letter into a spiral, lit it, and held it for his companion. He continued to hold it until it was consumed, and dropped the fragment—a fiery star—from the open window. He watched it as it fell, and returned to his friend.

"Old man," he said, placing his hands upon Brown's shoulders, "in ten minutes I'll be on the road, and gone like that spark. We won't see each other agin; but, before I go, take a fool's advice—sell out all you've got, take your wife with you, and quit the country. It ain't no place for you, nor

her. Tell her she must go; make her go, if she won't. Don't whine because you can't be a saint, and she ain't an angel. Be a man—and treat her like a woman. Don't be a damn' fool. Good-by."

He tore himself from Brown's grasp, and leaped down the stairs like a deer. At the stable door he collared the half-sleeping hostler, and backed him against the wall. "Saddle my horse in two minutes, or I'll—" The ellipsis was frightfully suggestive

"The missis said you was to have the buggy," stammered the man.

"Damn the buggy!"

The horse was saddled as fast as the nervous hands of the astounded hostler could manipulate buckle and strap.

"Is anything up, Mr. Hamlin?" said the man, who like all his class admired the *élan* of his fiery patron, and was really concerned in his welfare.

"Stand aside!"

The man fell back. With an oath, a bound, and a clatter, Jack was into the road. In another moment, to the man's half-awakened eyes, he was but a moving cloud of dust in the distance, toward which a star just loosed from its brethren was trailing a stream of fire.

But early that morning the dwellers by the Wingdam turnpike, miles away, heard a voice, pure as a skylark's, singing afield. They who were asleep turned over on their rude couches to dream of youth and love and olden days. Hardfaced men and anxious gold-seekers, already at work, ceased their labors and leaned upon their picks, to listen to a romantic vagabond ambling away against the rosy sunrise.

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ON SALE ABOUT AUGUST 5

Wyatt Earp Plays a Lone Hand

By Walter Noble Burns

JOHNNY-BEHIND-THE DEUCE *stirs up a hornet's nest when he guns down a prominent citizen in the street. The constable manages to hurry his prisoner out of town, but when Johnny arrives in Tombstone he runs smack into another batch of trouble. Then it's up to Wyatt Earp, Tombstone's justly famous marshal, to protect the killer from mob violence. How Earp meets this test of cold nerve makes a tense episode in frontier history, taken from Burns's book,* Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest.

MR. HENRY SCHNEIDER sat at a pine-board table in the Chinaman's in Charleston and ate his breakfast in silence. Mr. Schneider was the chief engineer at the stamp mill of the Tombstone Mining and Milling Company. He could see through the front window of the restaurant the big plant on the other side of the San Pedro just across the bridge, its stacks pouring out a steady stream of smoke that went drifting over the hills. The January morning was cold; a heavy

From TOMBSTONE *by Walter Noble Burns copyright 1927 by Doubleday & Co., Inc.*

frost still covered the ground; the current of the narrow river looked almost black between the snowy ice sheets projecting from the banks, and the tracks of teams were still visible in the white rime on the plank flooring of the bridge.

Mr. Schneider was an engineer of some note and a high-salaried employee at the stamp mill, which was kept busy day and night reducing ore from the Tombstone mines. He was a rather haughty, aloof man whose morning mood was usually morose and disagreeable and who required a good strong cup of coffee and several hours of sunlight to thaw him out into ordinary business urbanity.

At a near-by table Mr. Robert Petty, the village blacksmith, and Mr. John O'Rourke were devouring ham and eggs with some gusto. Mr. O'Rourke especially seemed in a mood of cheerfulness.

"I didn't make no killing last night," Mr. O'Rourke was saying. "But I done pretty good. The deuce stood by me. That card is certainly good to me."

Mr. O'Rourke was a gambler of the variety sometimes referred to as tin-horn. He was what might be termed, if one wished to be brutally frank, an insignificant little runt, wizened, undersized, colorless, with a prominent nose and huge ears that stood out from his head. He hung around Charleston gambling-houses and saloons and dealt stud or monte when he had a chance and played faro if he happened to be in funds.

The card on the faro layout for which Mr. O'Rourke showed a particular predilection was the deuce. He stacked up his chips on the deuce: he was never known to copper it, always played it open, and the deuce rewarded his blind faith by winning for him with startling frequency. Few people had ever been sufficiently interested in him to learn his real name, and because of his mania for backing his favorite card, he had become commonly known among the gamblers of Charleston and Tombstone as Johnny Behind-the-Deuce.

It happened that Mr. Schneider, Mr. Petty, and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce arose from breakfast at the same time and, having paid their bills at the front counter to Hop Sing, stood for a few moments warming themselves about the stove in the corner of the restaurant. To the engineer Johnny remarked pleasantly that it was a cold day. Schneider gave him a sour look and did not reply.

"I say it's a cold day," Johnny repeated, on the chance that the engineer had failed to hear his shrewd observation.

Mr. Schneider preserved a scowling silence.

"Go to hell!" snarled Johnny. "I wonder if you are too deaf to hear that?"

Mr. Schneider heard that quite distinctly and, flaring into a rage, snorted out profane abuse. Mr. Petty pulled Johnny by the sleeve out the door into the street. But the cold air outside had no effect on Johnny's anger, which grew hotter.

"I guess that feller thinks he's too big to talk to the likes of me," he growled.

"What do you care?" soothed Mr. Petty. "Leave him alone."

The two men stopped near the end of the bridge. While Mr. Petty was still trying to calm Johnny, Mr. Schneider came bustling along on his way to his office at the mill across the river.

"I got a notion to learn you some manners," snapped Johnny as the engineer passed.

Mr. Schneider halted and, glaring furiously, reached into his trousers pocket. Johnny jerked out a revolver and killed him. An unopened pocketknife was found in the dead man's hand.

Constable George McKelvey placed Johnny under arrest. As he started for the calaboose with his prisoner, the mill whistle burst into a long-continued roar. The mill hands began to pour from the buildings.

"I guess they've heard about it over there," said McKelvey, and began to revolve emergency plans. The crowd at the mill started toward town. McKelvey headed for a livery stable instead of the calaboose.

The mob stormed into the streets. "Get a rope," was the cry. "Hang him to the bridge."

McKelvey smuggled his prisoner out of the livery stable by the back way into a buckboard to which a span of mules had been hastily hitched.

"This is a pretty mess," remarked McKelvey as the two men settled themselves into the buggy. "Tombstone is nine miles away, but I'll get you there if I can."

A moment later the mob, yelling and shaking fists in disappointed rage, saw Constable McKelvey and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce thundering across the bridge and pointing out on the road for Tombstone, the team of mules at a dead run.

The flight of the prisoner presented a problem, but the workmen whose engineer had been so ruthlessly shot down were in earnest and were not to be so easily cheated. They hurriedly prepared for pursuit. They searched Charleston for saddle horses; they commandeered buggies and spring wagons; they armed themselves with six-shooters and rifles. This cost time, and the two fugitives were laying the miles behind them. But at length the crowd was ready. Fifty men on horseback set out on the trail at breakneck speed. Others in wagons, clattering far behind in a straggling procession, hoped at

least to be in at the death.

Constable McKelvey and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce had passed quickly out of sight through a gap in the hills that border the San Pedro. From a height near the old Brunckow mine, Johnny Behind-the-Deuce had a last distant glimpse of Charleston. He could detect no great stir or confusion; the town seemed quiet enough.

"Maybe they gave it up," he said

"Maybe," replied McKelvey.

McKelvey pulled his tired mules to a trot He would conserve their stamina. He might have to call on them yet for all the speed they had to give. The Tombstone road was no boulevard. All the way it wound with a thousand crooks and turns through a roughly broken country covered with cactus and mesquite. It climbed over high hills, skirted the edges of ravines, came down abruptly into sandy arroyos and climbed steeply out again.

When the buckboard had clambered out of Twin Gulches past Robbers' Roost, Johnny Behind-the-Deuce saw far back a long, trailing veil of dust sweeping up from behind a ridge in filmy whorls against the sky. He watched it with the fixity of fascination A horseman galloped out of the dust over the crest of the road. A swarm of others came riding hard after him Small in the distance, they looked like menacing goblins to his frightened eyes. He half rose from his seat, his hand clutching McKelvey's shoulder.

"Here they come!" he yelled in McKelvey's ear.

McKelvey lashed his mules into a run. Of a sudden came a soft tiny noise like the smothered popping of a cork. A sharper metallic ping like the vibration of a taut, mile-long wire. Then the distinct and unmistakable thin whine of a bullet. Spouts of dust shot into the air beside the wheels. The road behind began to dance with dusty puffs as under a thunder shower. The faint clatter of hoofs grew into a rushing storm of sound.

McKelvey and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce bent forward in their seats with white, tense faces. Around the flanks of the plunging mules McKelvey wrapped his rawhide whip. Down the slopes, up the grades flew the swaying buckboard, taking the curves on two wheels. The pursuers were gaining rapidly, firing at every jump, yelling like savages For Johnny Behind-the-Deuce it looked like cases in a losing deal; a skeleton hand seemed reaching out for his last stack of chips.

Two miles out of Tombstone stood Jack McCann's Last Chance saloon McKelvey and Johnny saw the long adobe roadhouse looming ahead with one last flicker of hope.

"Guess McCann's is our last

chance all right," said McKelvey between clenched teeth. "We'll never beat 'em into Tombstone."

"If we get inside, maybe we can stand 'em off," replied Johnny desperately.

McCann had just mounted a race mare that stood saddled in front of his saloon. This filly was a thoroughbred named Molly McCarthy and had won local fame by showing her heels to the best horses around Tombstone. McCann had her entered for a race over at the Watervale track on the Contention road and was preparing to give her an exercise gallop to tune her up for this event.

A slim, spirited beauty was Molly McCarthy, and her satin skin sparkled as she champed the bit and pranced about on her clean, antelope legs in her eagerness for the run. McCann had turned her head to the road, when he caught sight of the pell-mell chase bearing down upon him. He stared in amazement. Well, what the divil?

"Take this lad behind you quick and get him into Tombstone before those fellows lynch him," shouted McKelvey as he brought his mules back on their haunches.

McCann didn't know Johnny Behind-the-Deuce, but he numbered many outlaws among his friends and had a lurking sympathy for fellows in trouble with the law. Many an all-night carouse Curly Bill and his merry men had had in the Last Chance saloon. And here was a sporting proposition that might stir the blood of any sporting man. McCann wasted no time in questions, but brought Molly McCarthy alongside the buckboard.

"Pile on," he said.

As Johnny Behind-the-Deuce wrapped his arms around McCann's waist, the mare broke at a bound into racing speed as if at the drop of a starter's flag and went skimming over the road with long, frictionless strides.

Drawing his jaded mules off to the side of the road, McKelvey watched McCann and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce dwindle in the distance. As the lynching party roared past, McKelvey rubbed his chin and grinned. "You'll play hell catching him now," he yelled cheerfully.

As McCann and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce rode into Tombstone, the mine whistles on the hill began to boom. News of the murder of the engineer had been telegraphed ahead from Charleston. Miners flocked from the shafts and streamed down the hill toward town.

Wyatt Earp was dealing faro in the Oriental Doc Holliday lolled in the lookout chair. Virgil Earp lounged against the bar. Business was dull. The place was as quiet as a prayer meeting. McCann and Johnny Behind-the-Deuce burst in upon the peaceful scene.

"Mob coming," McCann broke out breathlessly. "Going to lynch this boy. Hurry up. Do something, for God's sake. No time to lose."

Wyatt Earp slid one card off the deck and then another. He took in a bet or two. He paid a few winning wagers. With the skill of old habit, he leveled off the tops of the stacks of chips in the check-rack and carefully evened them along the sides with the backs of his fingers. He overlooked no detail of customary routine. Then he turned up his box. The game, for the present, was over.

"Hold on to your chips, boys," he said to the players. "I'll cash 'em as soon as I've finished with this little business matter."

As a gambler, he pushed back his chair. He rose as an officer of the law. Stepping to the front door, he saw a block west, at Fifth and Tough Nut streets, an excited crowd gathered about the newly arrived horsemen from Charleston. On beyond, the hill was swarming with miners. The situation impressed him as having possibilities. But the Oriental, facing on two streets, and with great doors and windows, was no place in which to stand off a mob. There was a bowling-alley across Allen Street in the next block to the north, narrow and wedged between stores and with doors only at front and rear. A handful of determined men might hold it against a multitude.

Wyatt Earp escorted Johnny Behind-the-Deuce to the bowling-alley. He posted Virgil Earp at the rear and Doc Holliday behind the locked front door. He was ready now.

He had never met Johnny Behind-the-Deuce before. He had seen him a few times around Tombstone gambling-houses and had chuckled over his strange nickname and the origin of it. He knew nothing of the right or wrong of the killing of the Charleston engineer. But now this little shrimp of a fellow had been placed in his custody; it was his duty as an officer to protect him. This sense of official duty—nothing else—actuated him. If he had to die in performance of his duty, he would die.

An ominous confused murmur rose from the direction of the hill, a deep moaning bellow like that of brutes stirring to fury, the note of menace unmistakable. The mob was starting. Here it came in a rushing, crushing mass eastward through Fifth Street. It surrounded the Oriental. A yell went up like a rocket—"He's in the bowling-alley."

With a roar, the mob turned for the rush to the bowling-alley. As it changed front, it came face to face with Wyatt Earp at a distance of 20 paces. He stood alone in the middle of Allen Street, a double-barreled shotgun resting in the crook of his elbow.

"Hold on, boys." Wyatt Earp raised his hand and for a moment kept it poised in air. "Don't make any fool play. There ain't no sense in this."

The mob halted in its forward sweep. "Where've you got that murdering rat hid?"

"He's right in there." Wyatt Earp jerked his thumb at the bowling-alley. "And he's going to stay in there. He's my prisoner now, and you fellers ain't goin' to get him."

"The hell we ain't."

"You boys better disperse." Wyatt Earp said it as calmly as he might have said *Tut-tut* to naughty urchins in school. "Go on home. Go on back to work. I'm here to take care of this prisoner. And I'm going to take care of him."

The silence was shattered by sudden fierce yells

"Ki-yi-ki-yi-yip!"

"Wa-wa-wa-wa—wa-hoo!"

The shrieks were broken into wild staccato by tapping the mouth with the hand. There were old Apache fighters in that crowd The front ranks began to stamp up and down like savages doing a war dance.

"Here we go, boys."

"Smash in the bowling-alley."

"String the dirty varmint to a telegraph pole."

Wyatt Earp cocked both barrels of his shotgun "Come on, then, you yellow curs. Let's see you get him."

His booming voice was like the roar of a lion at bay as he flung the challenge in the mob's teeth. Again the crowd stood still in wavering indecision.

One foot advanced, his shotgun held tensely across his breast ready for instant action, Wyatt Earp stood, one man against 500 Grimly alone. Hopelessly isolated for the moment from all the rest of the world. No help to fall back on, no chance to run, no shelter, no place of refuge. Just a man out there in the middle of the street, all by himself with only his own strength to depend on and only his own courage to save him. Before him a mob thirsting for blood, closing in for the kill, its victim almost within reach. The front line, stretching across the street from wall to wall, bristled with six-shooters and rifles, every face twisted and flaming with passion One solitary man blocked the road to vengeance.

"That fool's bluffing." The shout was vibrant with impatient resentment. "Call his bluff and watch him quit."

Wyatt Earp brought his shotgun to his shoulder with a snap. At the level of a man's heart, he swung its muzzle very slowly across the crowd from one side of the street to the other and very slowly back again.

"Don't make any mistake," he flung back. "I'll blow the belly off of the first man that makes a

move."

The storm was working to the bursting-point. This was ridiculous. One man hold back 500? Rush him, disarm him, brush him aside.

"What's the matter out there in front?"

"Go on!"

The men behind began to push and shoulder forward. Flickering waves of movement told of gathering momentum for a fresh start. A powerful thrust made the front ranks bend and sway. It was like a ripple presaging the final rush.

"Kill him!"

Wyatt Earp's jaws set. His eyes blazed His face in that tense moment was so marble-white that his tawny mustache looked black against it. Again he swept the crowd with his leveled gun, and death lurked in the black depths of those twin muzzles.

"Kill me." His voice had a conversational steadiness. "I'm ready. Ought to be easy: there are enough of you But I'll do a little killing myself. You can get me; but I'll take a few of you to hell with me."

The drama had rushed to crisis. Here was a proposition. They could take it or leave it. He was ready to die. If they were, too, all right. Yes, they could kill him. One shot would do the business They couldn't miss him. But he would take some of them to the grave with him. He might get two or three. Or half a dozen might crumple down under the scattering double charge of buckshot. It was sure death for some of them. Did they want to gamble? Were they willing to take the chance?

Well?

Silence fell. For a space the mob stood motionless, hesitating, undecided, weighing the odds. Then abruptly the tension snapped. Some men in front, looking a little sheepish, drew back into the crowd. Others followed. The front line grew ragged; it was breaking up. Not much sense, after all, in getting killed for a dirty little blackguard like Johnny Behind-the-Deuce. The law might hang him anyhow. This lynching business was pretty wild and crazy if you stopped to think about it. Just as well to let the law take its course.

Men at the outer edges began to walk away. Gaps and lanes opened in the thinning ranks. Throngs began to bustle through the side streets like flood waters draining off through sluiceways. Soon all had disappeared except a few small groups that still hung about the corner. The storm had passed; peaceful sunlight once more bathed the empty streets.

Wyatt Earp, leaning on his shotgun, stood in silence and watched the mob melt away. Then he stepped with an air of leisureliness over to the sidewalk.

"Go down to the O. K. corral, Doc," he said to Holliday in the

casual voice of one arranging a detail of business routine, "and see if Johnny Montgomery can let us have a spring wagon. I guess I'll send Johnny Behind-the-Deuce over to Tucson."

Johnny Behind-the-Deuce was taken in the spring wagon under strong guard to Tucson. Ten heavily armed men on horseback accompanied him as far as Dennis's ranch but, as no attack developed, turned back to Tombstone. Johnny broke jail at Tucson before his trial, and though Papago Indian trailers were used to track him, he was not recaptured. He disappeared from the Southwest, and whatever became of the murderous little scalawag with the funny pseudonym no one in that country knows to this day.

When your favorite Western hero draws and fires six shots before reloading, take it with a grain of salt. It is general practice, as a safety measure, to carry only five cartridges in the cylinder, keeping the hammer down on an empty chamber.

"Remarkable resemblance, isn't it?"

Free-for-All

ONE of the characters in "Thunder Mountain," the Zane Grey story in this issue, is a smooth villain named Rand Leavitt, who for some time carries on a successful masquerade as a law-abiding citizen in the role of town judge and vigilante chief. Naturally, a parallel is suggested with the noted real-life career of Henry Plummer, the sheriff and bandit chief of Alder Gulch. No ordinary border roughneck, Plummer, who refused to let a little thing like a bullet in his right arm interfere with his six-gun exploits—he learned to shoot just as well with his left hand—moved into the Montana gold fields and coolly got himself elected sheriff of Alder Gulch. Thus camouflaged, he proceeded to organize and direct the depredations of a criminal gang whose members sardonically dubbed themselves "The Innocents." Robbery, homicide, and assorted other felonies constituted their regular occupation until the honest inhabitants of the region hardly dared to go out at night. No handy Thunder Mountain was available to wreak natural justice on this frontier Dillinger, but at last the decent elements of the community got wise to Mr. Plummer, and man-made justice proved fully as satisfactory—if, perhaps, not as majestic and awe-inspiring as the geological gymnastics involved in our Zane Grey story—when Alder Gulch's sheriff and all his night-riding cutthroat crew were rounded up and hanged by the neck until they were very dead.

●Victor Rousseau, author of "The Branded Man," one of the new shorts in this issue of ZGWM, has long been a popular contributor to the pages of Western and

adventure magazines. In addition to hundreds of short stories and novelettes, he has had 20 novels published.

● Joe Hook, who wrote "The Ghost Walks," the little mining yarn in this issue, himself prospected and mined in Montana, Arizona, and California. He never struck it lucky prospecting, so drifted into the Yakima Valley, where he bought a ranch, and subsequently started writing. Later he gave up the ranch but, fortunately, not the writing. Now a resident of Tacoma, his favorite relaxation consists of salmon trolling in Puget Sound. Watch for more of his yarns in ZGWM!

● "Brown of Calaveras," another of Bret Harte's fine stories of the Old West, is not so widely known as either "The Luck of Roaring Camp" or "The Outcasts of Poker Flat." Those two tales, of course, have been reprinted almost numberless times, so, unless ZGWM readers demand them, our occasional Bret Harte republications will be made up of the best of his other stories.

● Walter Noble Burns's book, *Tombstone: An Iliad of the Southwest,* from which the fact article, "Wyatt Earp Plays a Lone Hand," is taken, has long been regarded as one of the outstanding books on the Old West. Its fascinating pages include chapters on such frontier characters as Curly Bill, John Ringo, and Billy Breakinridge, among others.

● More light-hearted doings than usual feature the picture story in this issue, "Law West of the Pecos" consisting of some highlights from the well-nigh incredible career of Roy Bean. Dale Robertson, responsible for the story, is a staff member; the very effective pictures were drawn by Ervin Schweig, a Milwaukee artist who not too long ago was devoting his talent, in such spare time as he could find while doing his bit in the U. S. Army, to the depiction of Uncle Sam's service men and women.

● S. Omar Barker, who penned the poem, "San Jacinto" (see inside back cover), responded to ZGWM's request for biographical data with more verse, as follows:

Barker in Brief

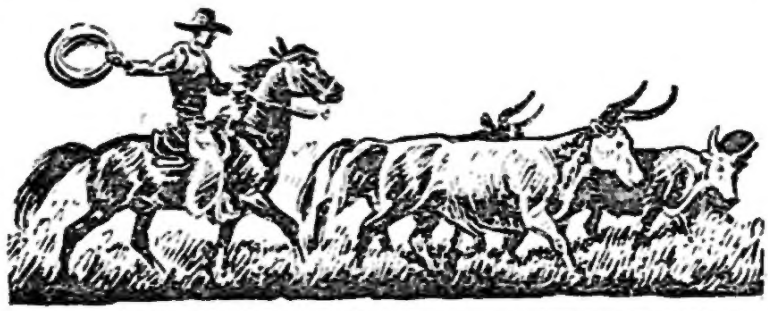
(Bark from the Log of His Autobiog)

I'm fifty-two and full of pills,
Yet tramp and ride these rugged hills
For deer, bear, bobcats, lions, turkey,
And find it fun, though plenty worky.
By trade I am a Western yarner,
And from the wildwood often garner
Some incidents that pattern well
Into a yarn or verse to sell.
Born out here where the hooty owls
Are said to mate with barnyard fowls,

I recognize that towns have uses—
But still *I live* among the spruces.
My wife, who loves to fish for trout,
Also turns Western stories out.
I've Rangered in the Forest service,
And taught school some, which made me nervice.
Served overseas in World War One,
But got no skin of mine unskun.
My one great hate in life's bright prism
Is the dirty red of Communism.
I'm fond of puns and nonsense verse—
And leave it to you which one is worse!

● The next issue of ZGWM will feature "The Drift Fence," a magazine abridgment of a slam-bang Zane Grey story in which fist fights are sprinkled thickly among the gunplay as a tenderfoot learns the ways of the West. New shorts by S. Omar Barker and Walker Tompkins will be flanked by numerous other highly readable fact and fiction pieces.

THE EDITORS



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6

SAN JACINTO (April 21, 1836)

By S. Omar Barker

The campfires of the Mexicans gleamed red a mile away.
Beside the San Jacinto, Houston's Texas Army lay.
Around the Texans' campfires low, eager talk went on:
"Tomorrow, boys! Tomorrow! We attack at break of dawn!
Ol' Santa Anna's ready with his fancy cavalry!
They're two to one against us, but at dawn we spread our spree!"

Santa Anna's bugles shrill the air as dawn fades out the night—
A welcome challenge from the foe, to men who itch for fight!
A Texas drum rolls reveille, and up the red sun creeps.
Still comes no order to attack—they say Sam Houston sleeps.
A growl of disappointment runs through the Texas troops:
"Now, what the hell we waitin' for?" Down the sky an eagle swoops
As Houston calmly saunters through the camp of restless men,
Yet gives no order to attack, nor hints at how nor when.
The day drags on past nooning, the sun rides high and bright.
"To hell with ol' Sam Houston! Ain't he got the guts to fight?"

Deaf Smith, the scout, comes riding. "Reinforcements," he reports.
"Two hundred Mex'can cavalry!" "What of it?" Houston snorts.
Eight hundred angry Texans, boiling over to attack,
Rebellious eye their General whose orders hold them back.

All day the Texans simmer, as the sun crawls through the sky. . . .
At last Sam Houston draws his sword and waves it, bright and high.
"The Alamo!" A cry goes up for vengeance on the foe.
Sam Houston on his stallion rides before them, calm and slow.
A few raise eager rifles—Houston's curse rings down the line:
"Now hold your fire, you Texas sons, until I give the sign!"
Some Mexican outposts open fire; Sam Houston's stallion falls.
He mounts another pony, waves his hat, and *"Fire!"* he calls.

All day his men had fretted underneath a broiling sun—
Ten hours to start a battle—but in *one hour* it was won!
At dawn the foe was ready, but at Houston's long delay,
Santa Anna thought the Texans did not dare attack that day.
They caught him and his troopers at *siesta* in their tents.
"Ol' Sam," the Texans tell it, "he knowed when to jump the fence!"

Sam Houston's boot o'erflowed with blood on San Jacinto's plain,
To win the Lone Star's freedom—at a cost of *six men* slain!

THE WOUNDED OUTLAW Painted by Leonard H. Reedy